

ST
EDITION
PAXTONS
FATHERZOO

PREFACE

Beginning our second half-century of continuous publication, the 51st edition of *Patterns* presents you, our readers, with the best in student creative work—poetry, prose, and visual arts—from St. Clair County Community College. Although this issue includes a total number of written entries comparable with past years, there is a shorter list of student writers than usual, since we have an unusual number of students with multiple works selected for inclusion. This is in part a result of the selection process itself. *Patterns* is a juried publication, which means that panels of judges evaluate submissions and determine which works are worthy of inclusion. This is a “blind” process—with names excluded and each work standing only on its merits. After having been sifted by our panels of local volunteer judges (see the acknowledgements listing their names), this year’s visiting writer, Laura Kasischke, has made the final determinations of winners in the genres of poetry and fiction. Her commentaries on the winners are to be found in the pages that follow. In addition to our thanks to professor Kasischke for agreeing to be this year’s judge, we also thank the Michigan Council for the Arts for its continued funding of the visiting writers program, the *Patterns Visiting Artists Forum*, now in its 10th year.

For the first time in our 51-year history, *Patterns* includes a new category—the screenplay. The editors elected to include the screenplay of Joshua Riehl’s short film, *The Killers*, in recognition of Josh’s remarkable work. As the many local citizens who’ve followed the story in the local media, or who have actually seen one of the screenings, can tell you, *The Killers* is Josh’s own powerful adaptation of Hemingway’s classic short story. Filmed locally with amateur actors and an all-volunteer crew, and a budget approaching zero dollars, Josh coaxed remarkable results out of these limited resources, resulting in a film that has received widespread praise and which has been entered for competition in film festivals around the country. We are proud to acknowledge Josh as one of our own (you can read his prize-winning story, “Drive By,” in last year’s edition) and congratulate him on his achievement.

VISITING AUTHOR

LAURA KASISCHKE

LAURA KASISCHKE has published six collections of poetry and three novels. Her novels include *Suspicious River* (1996), *White Bird in a Blizzard* (1999), and *The Life Before Her Eyes* (2002). They have been translated widely, and adapted for film. In 2006, her first novel for young adults, *Boy Heaven*, will be published by Harper Collins. Her most recent poetry collections are *Gardening in the Dark* (2004) from Ausable Press, and *Dance and Disappear*, which received the Juniper Award in 2002 from the University of Massachusetts Press. She has also been the recipient of two creative writing fellowships from the

National Endowment for the Arts, the DiCastagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, several Pushcart Prizes, the Bobst Award for Emerging Writers, and the Beatrice Hawley Award. Her other collections of poetry are *Wild Brides*, *Housekeeping in a Dream*, *Fire and Flower* and *What It Wasn't*. Her poems and stories have been published in *Ploughshares*, *The American Poetry Review*, *The New Republic*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Poetry*, *The Iowa Review* and elsewhere. Kasischke, an Assistant Professor with our program, has a joint appointment at the Residential College .

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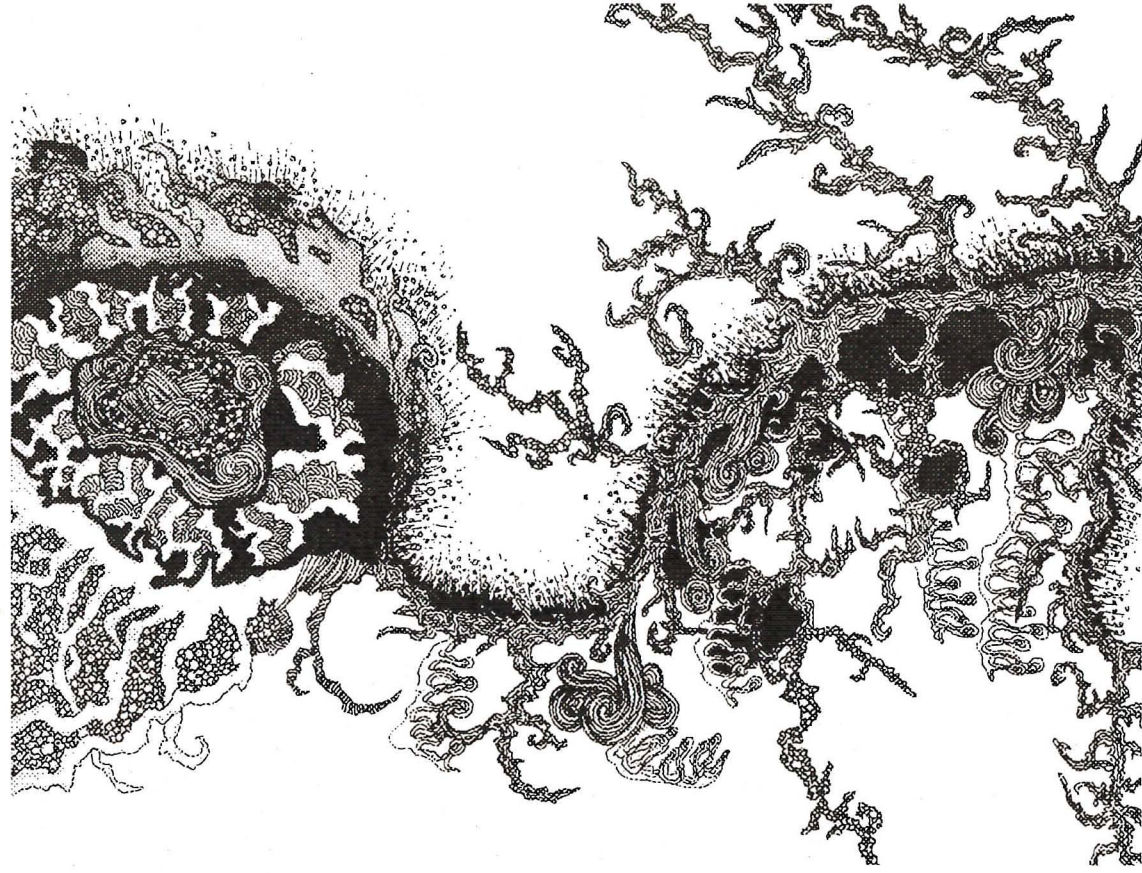
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1ST PLACE
ART

INSIDE OUT



Gach May

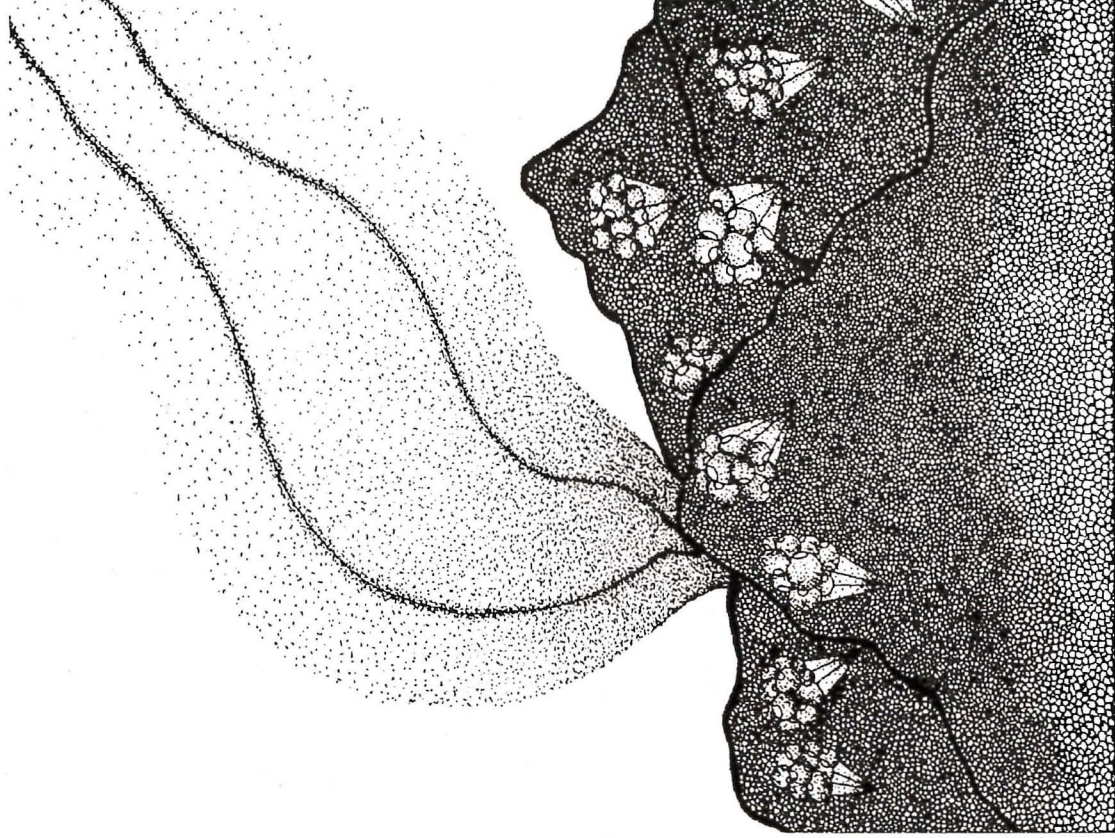


PEACOCK
FEATHER

Lauren Cross

3RD PLACE ART

SPRING

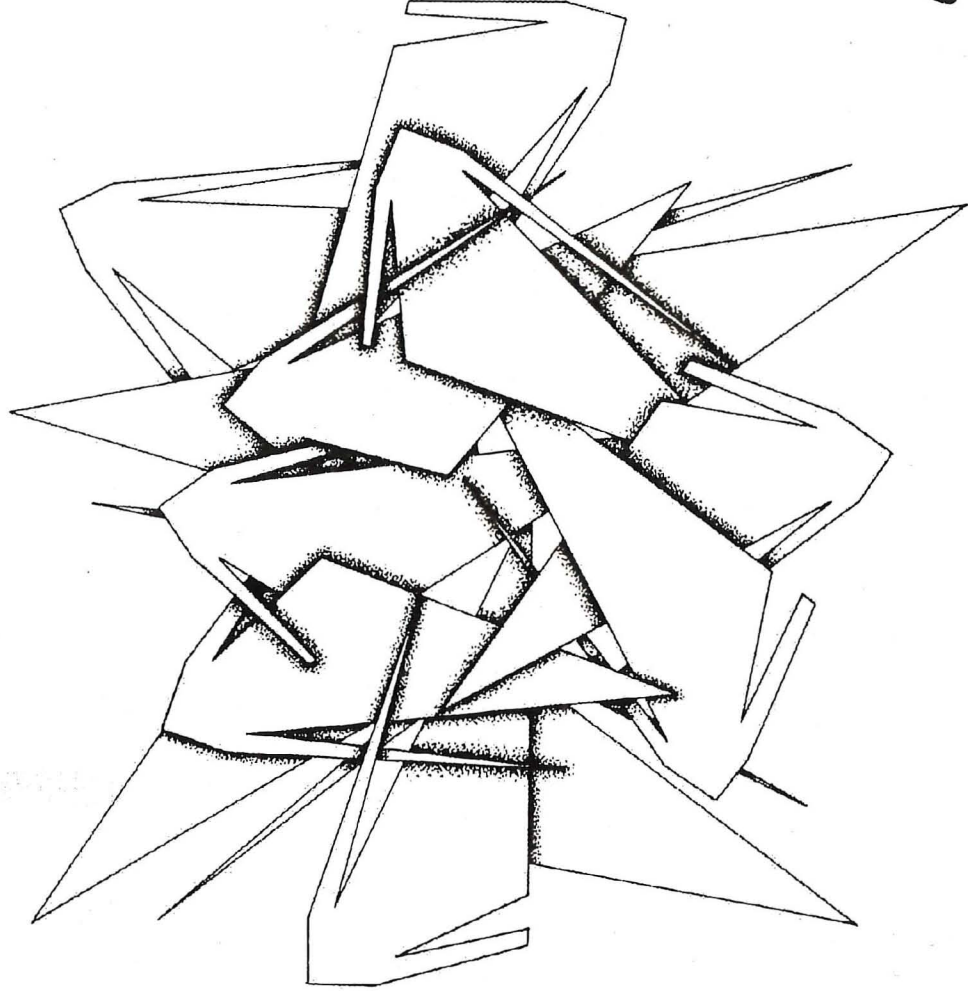


Kelly DeBoyer

HONORABLE MENTION

ART

ORAGAMI



Austin Russell

HONORABLE MENTION
ART

EARTH STORY

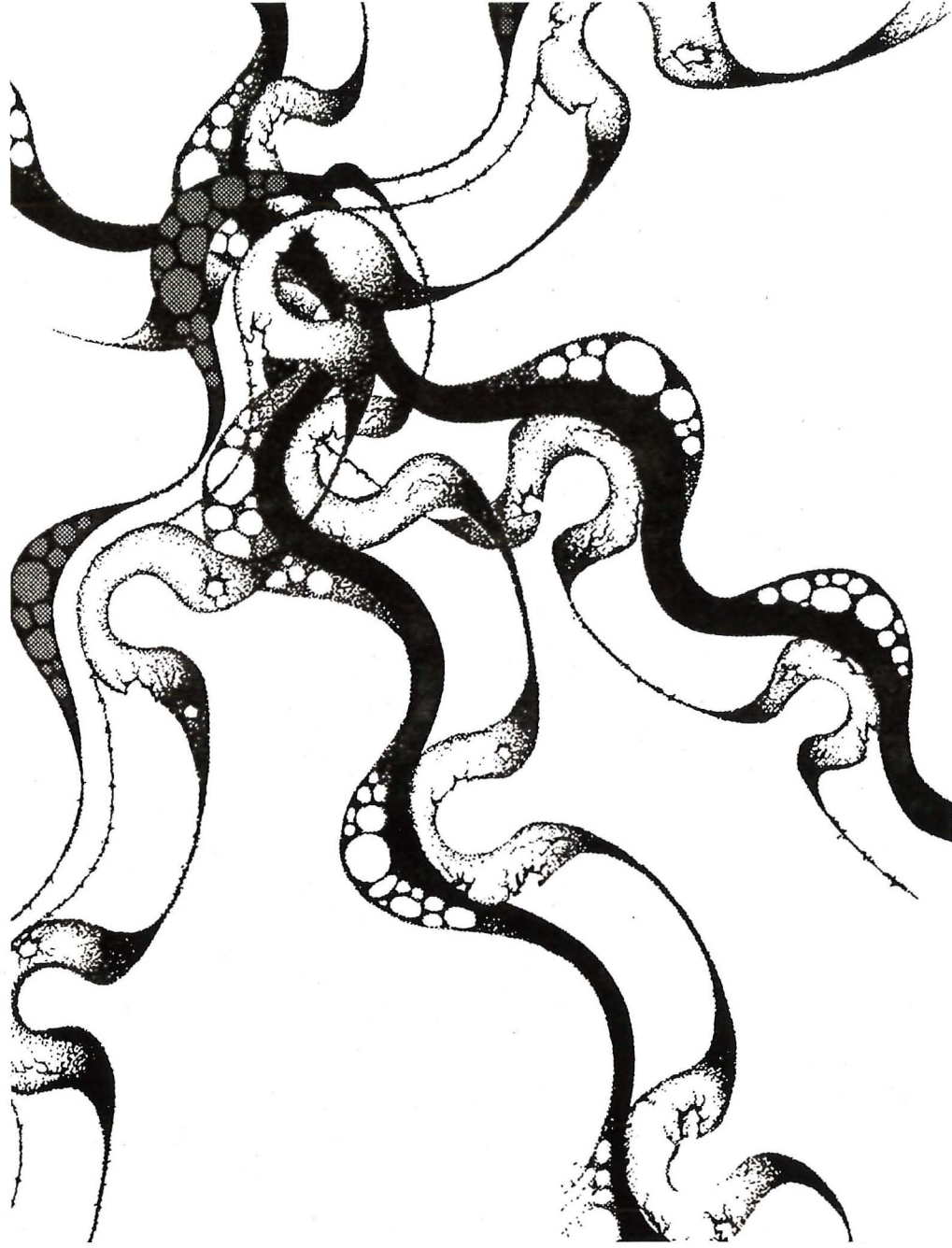


Jenny Walker

HONORABLE MENTION

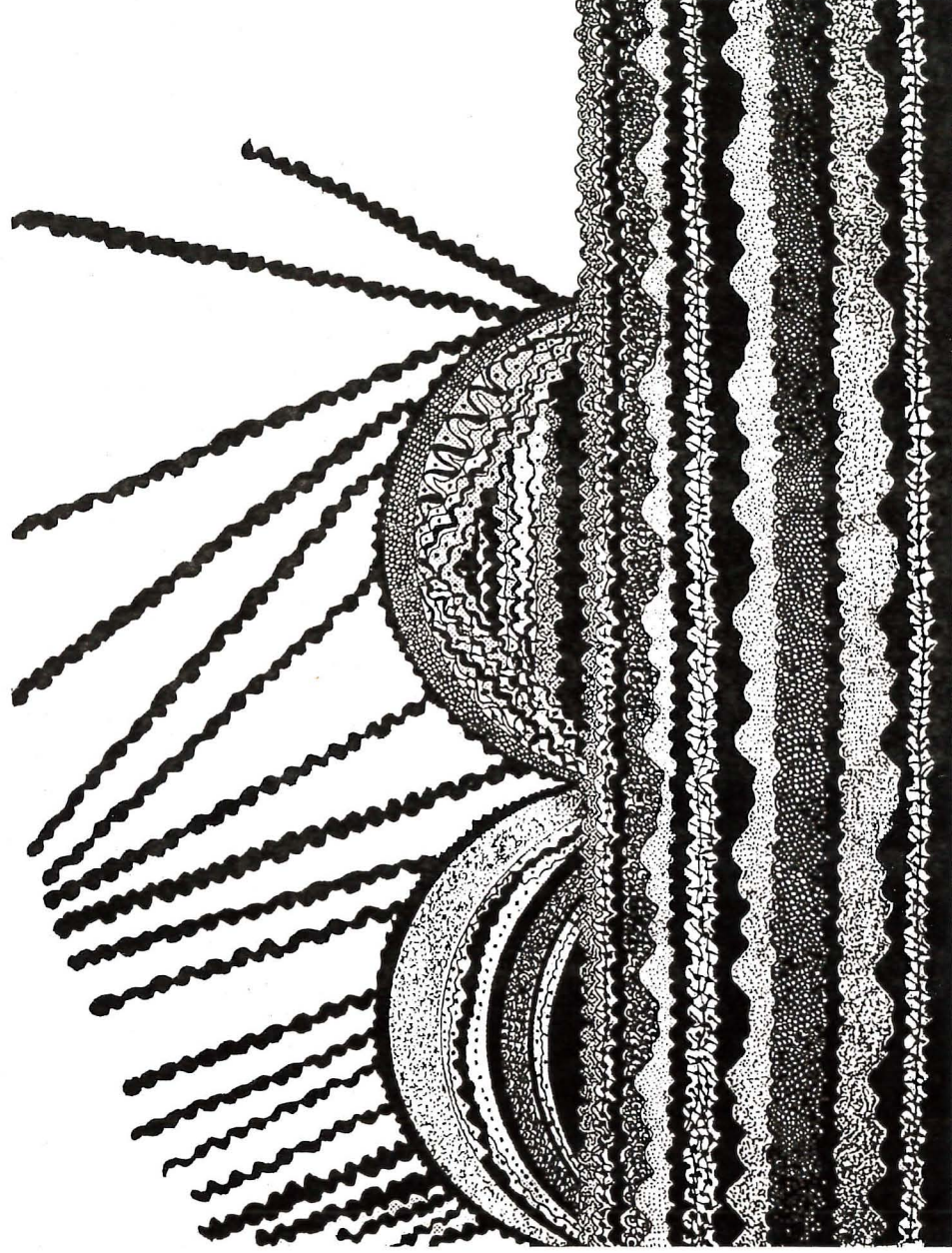
ART

DISSOLVING BALLET



Karen Peterson

HONORABLE MENTION ART



Emmy Koglin

PATRICK BOURKE AWARD

The Patrick Bourke Award honors an art student who has made a commitment to pursue an advanced degree in one of the visual art disciplines and has been an advocate and an emissary for "Art" at St. Clair County Community College. This year's recipient is Nathan Hearn and he has walked the campus from building to building and department to department in order to find classes, to explore ideas and perhaps to discover just who is Nathan Hearn.

What does it take to educate an artist? Then of course the first question should be: What kind of artist? – visual, musical, performing. If you ask Nathan these questions, he might share his educational plan with you. His transcript is his record and a diary of his time at our college. It documents courses in english, world history, sociology, calculus, anatomy and he took these just because he thought they would be interesting. Then there is the Visual and Performing Arts Department where he has taken improv, piano lessons, played french horn with our Symphonic Band, checked our digital graphics and still found time for "Art" with classes in drawing and design and color.

Nathan has exchanged and shared his thoughts and ideas from one class in one department with students and faculty in other classes and departments and has certainly taken his "Fine Arts Building" experience with him everywhere he goes.

James Joyce wrote a novel titled; Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and Nathan Hearn is currently creating his own self-portrait as he directs his own curiosity to explore the richness of his own world which will ultimately be the foundation of his own personal contribution to the "Arts".

Nathan Hearn

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

SEEING DOUBLE



Katie Bartle

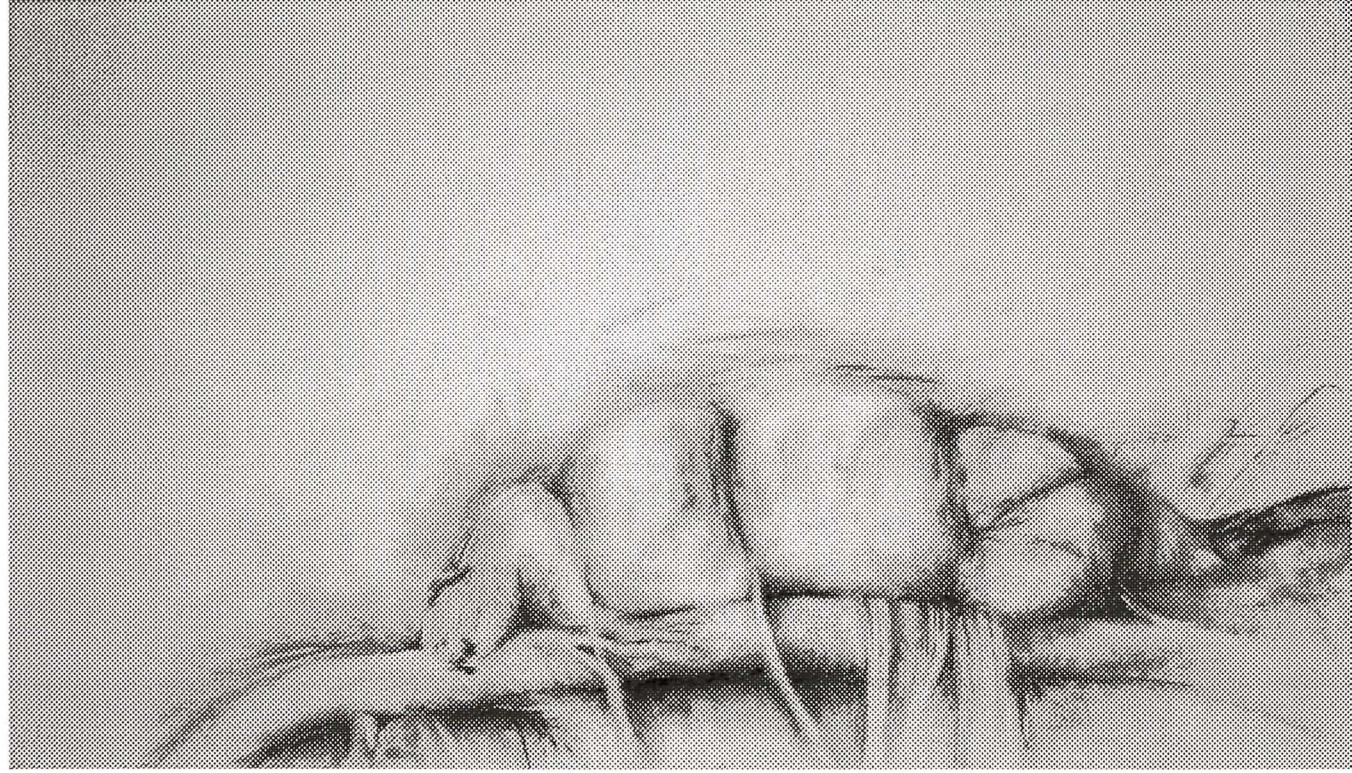
SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

INNER SANCTUM



Katie Bartle

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

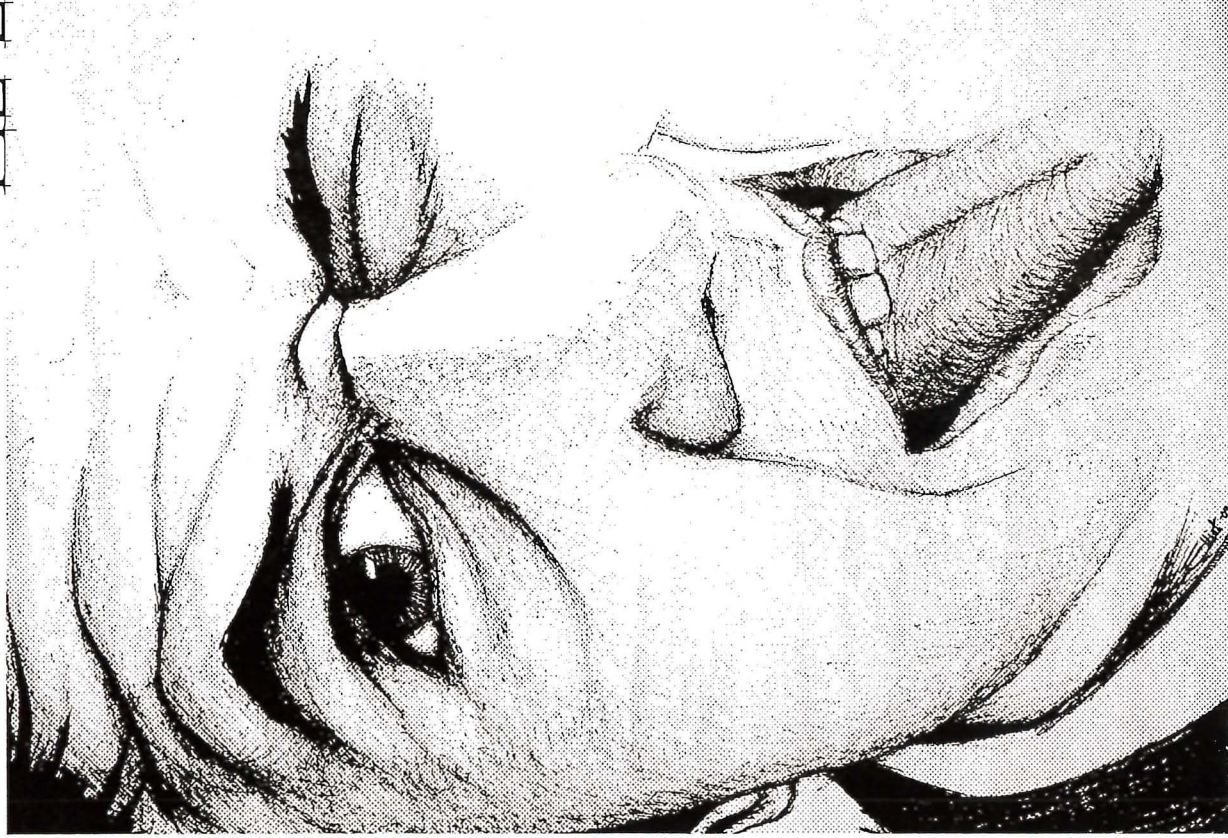


BANDAGED

Justin Cargo

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

HE LOOKED MORE
LIKE THIS



Elliot Chattray

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

COMPROMISING
POSITIONS



Eric Connor

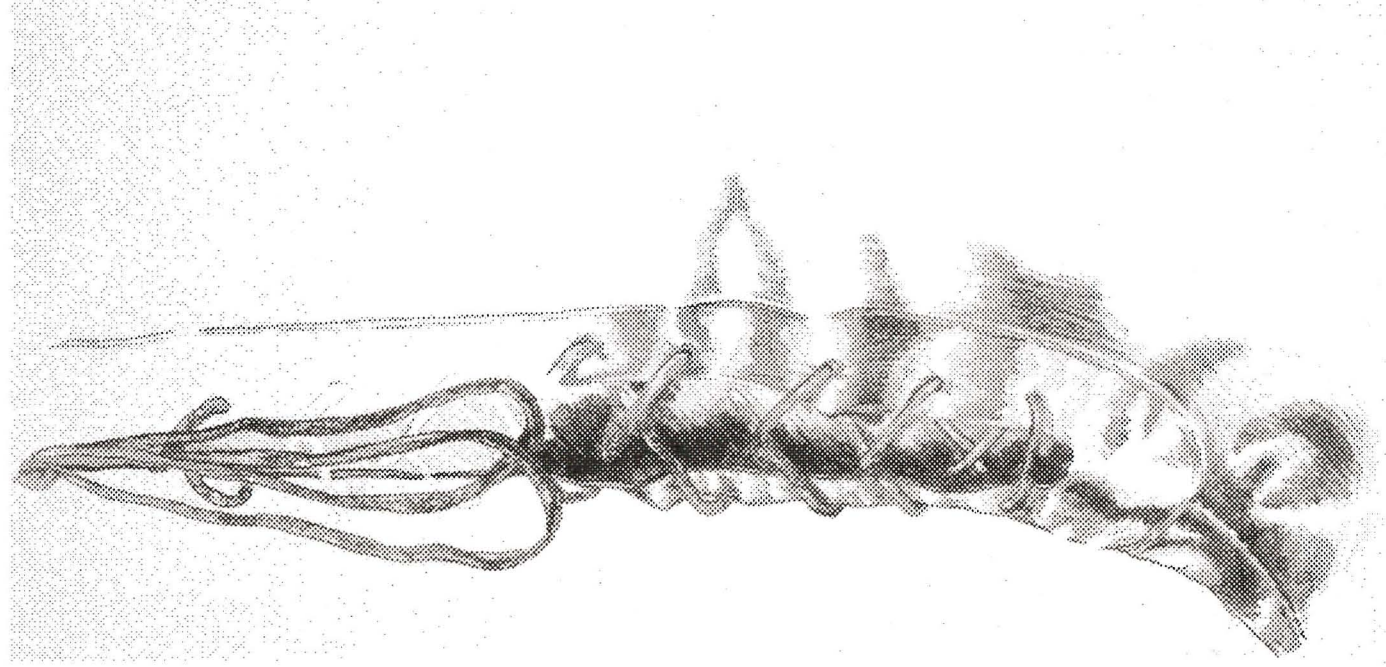
SELECTION OF MERIT ART

STRANDED



Eric Connor

SELECTION OF MERIT ART



TIGHTLY
LACED

Eric Connor

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

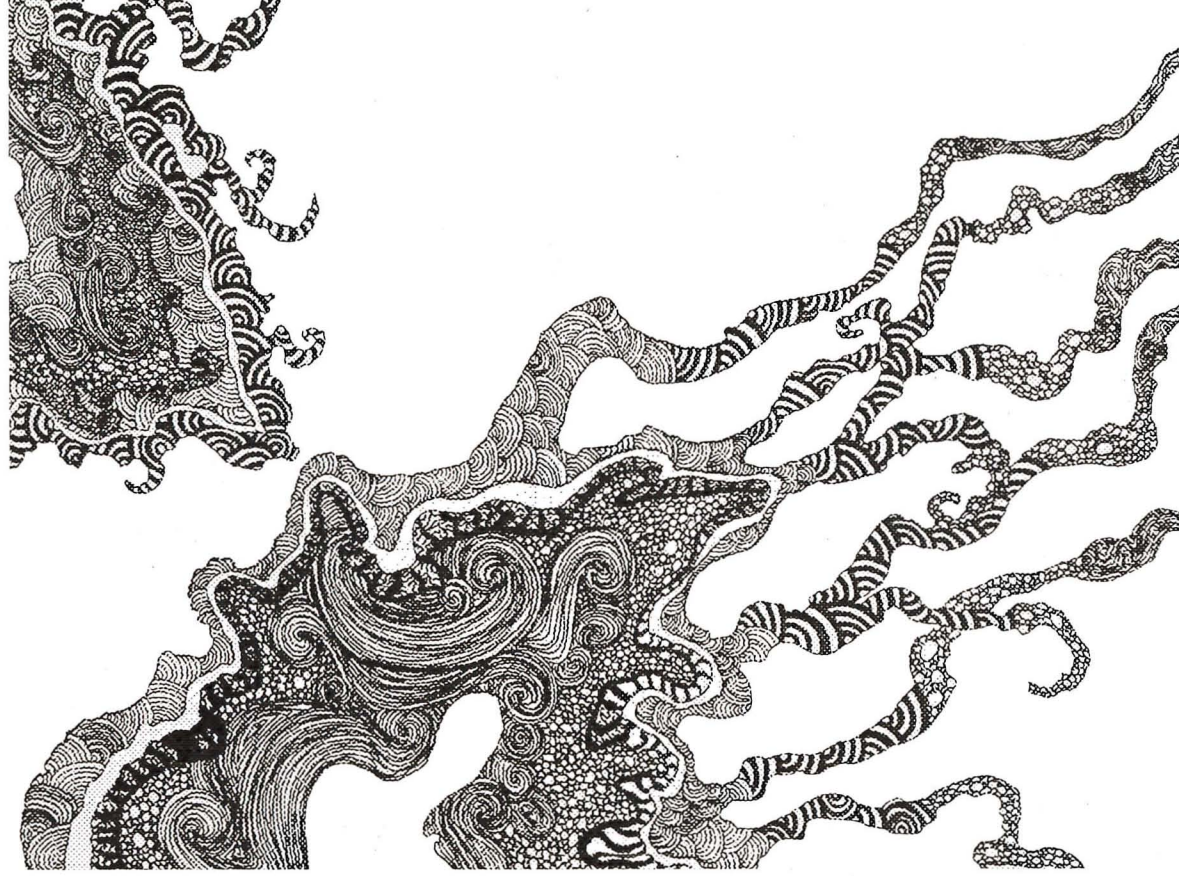
BIRD'S NEST



Lauren Cross

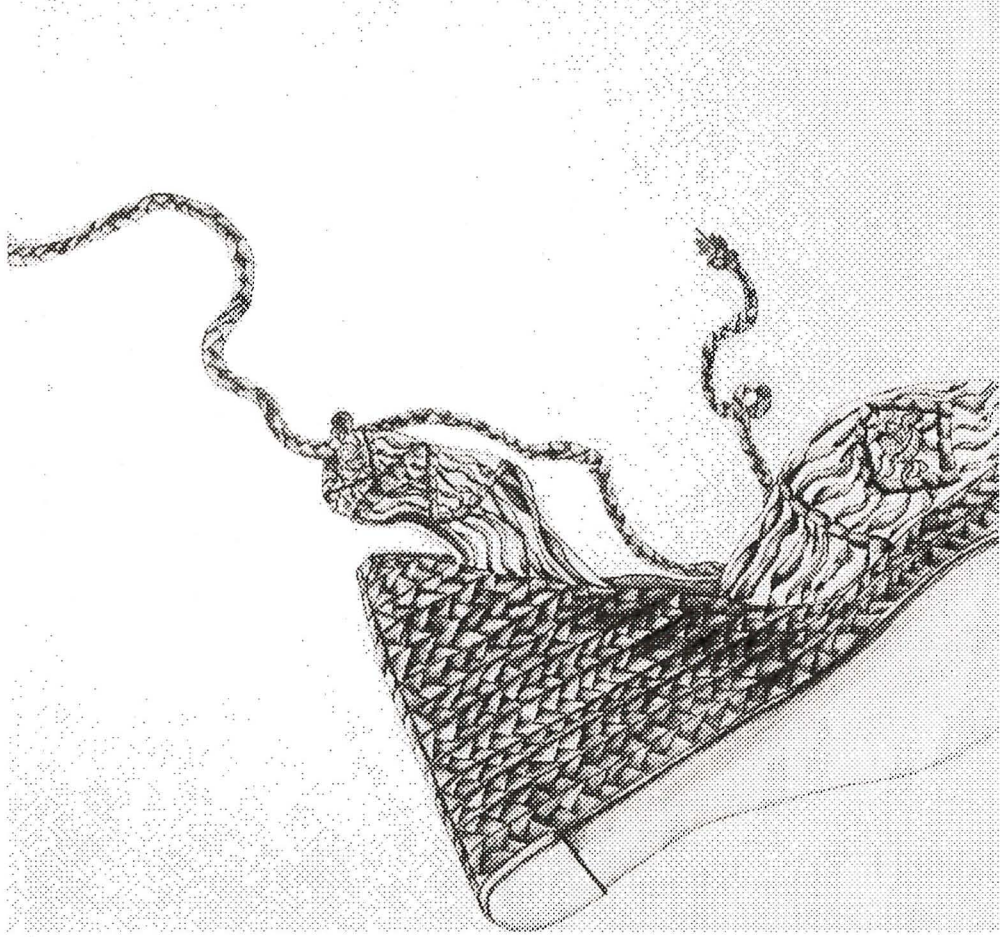
SELECTION OF MERIT ART

EVOLUTION



Lauren Cross

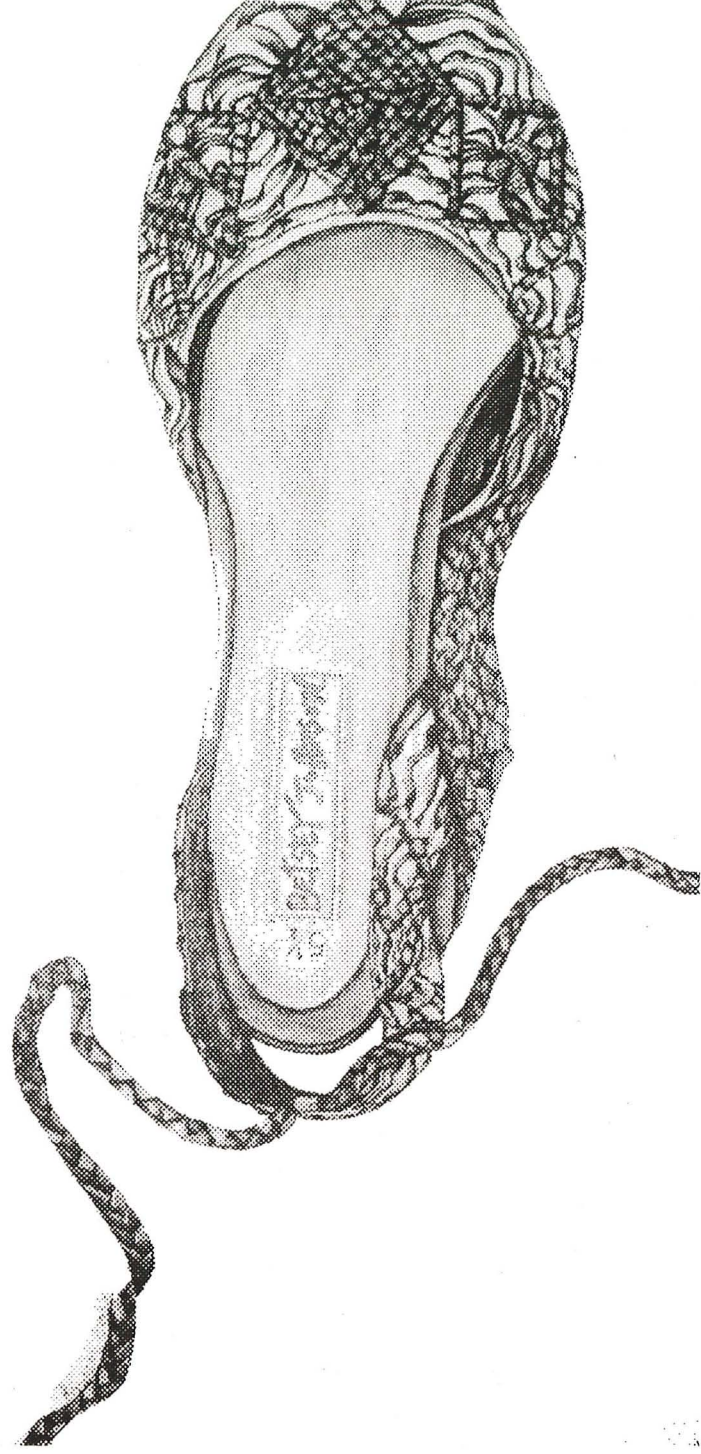
SHOE STUDY



Lauren Cross

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

ESPADRILLE



Lauren Cross

SELECTION OF MERIT ART

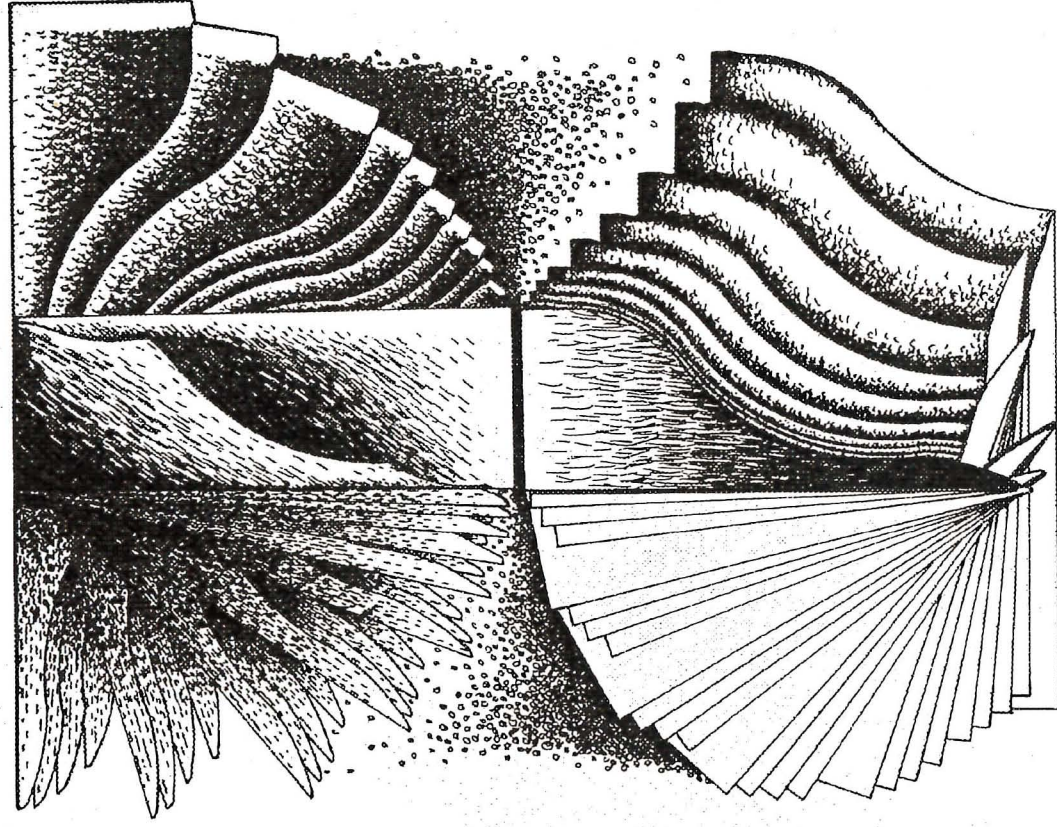
WIRED



Amanda Everitt

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

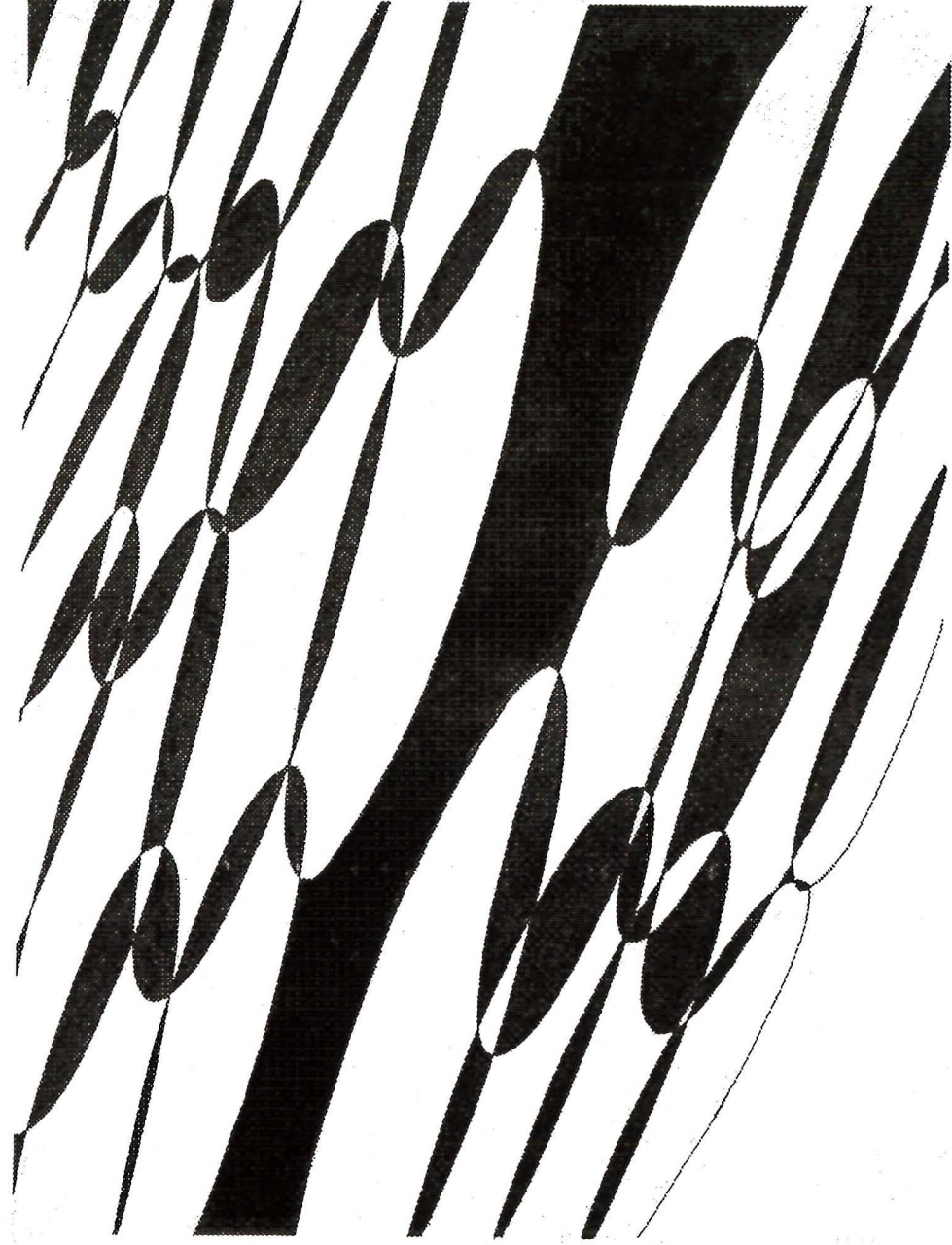
A VARIED ASSORTMENT OF A
DESIRED ENDEAVOR



Nathan Hearn

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

WEAVING PETOSKY



Nathan Hearn

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

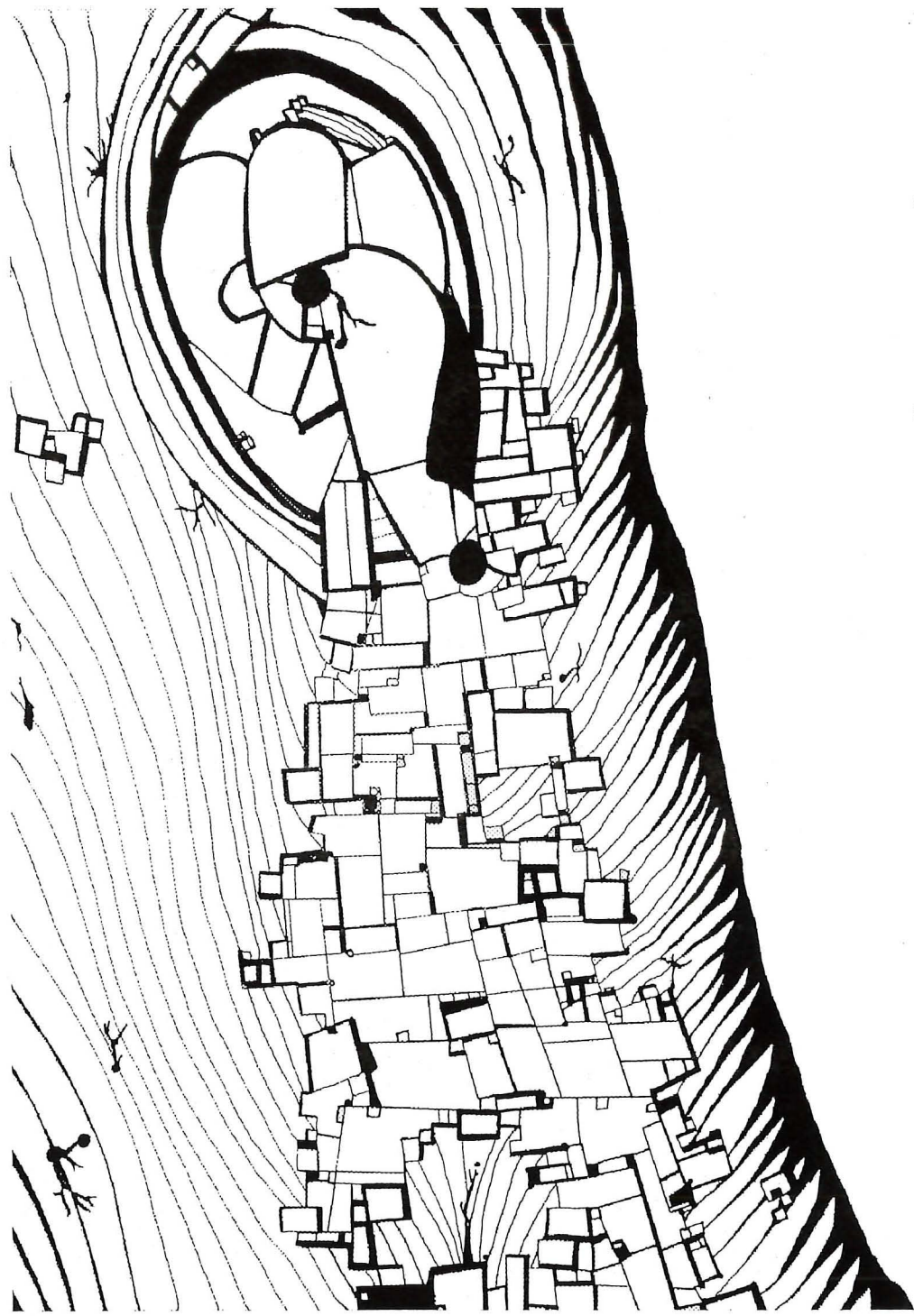


Z

Andrew Gutierrez

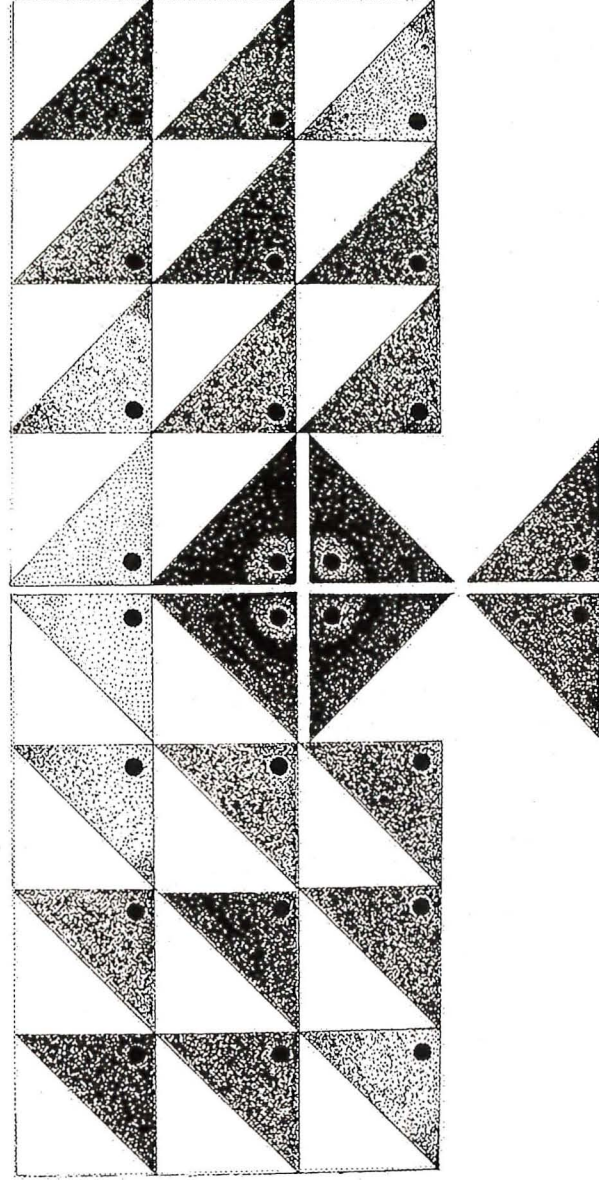
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DRIFT WOOD



Sandra Jezierski

SELECTION OF MERIT ART



Emmy Koglin

SELECTION OF MERIT ART

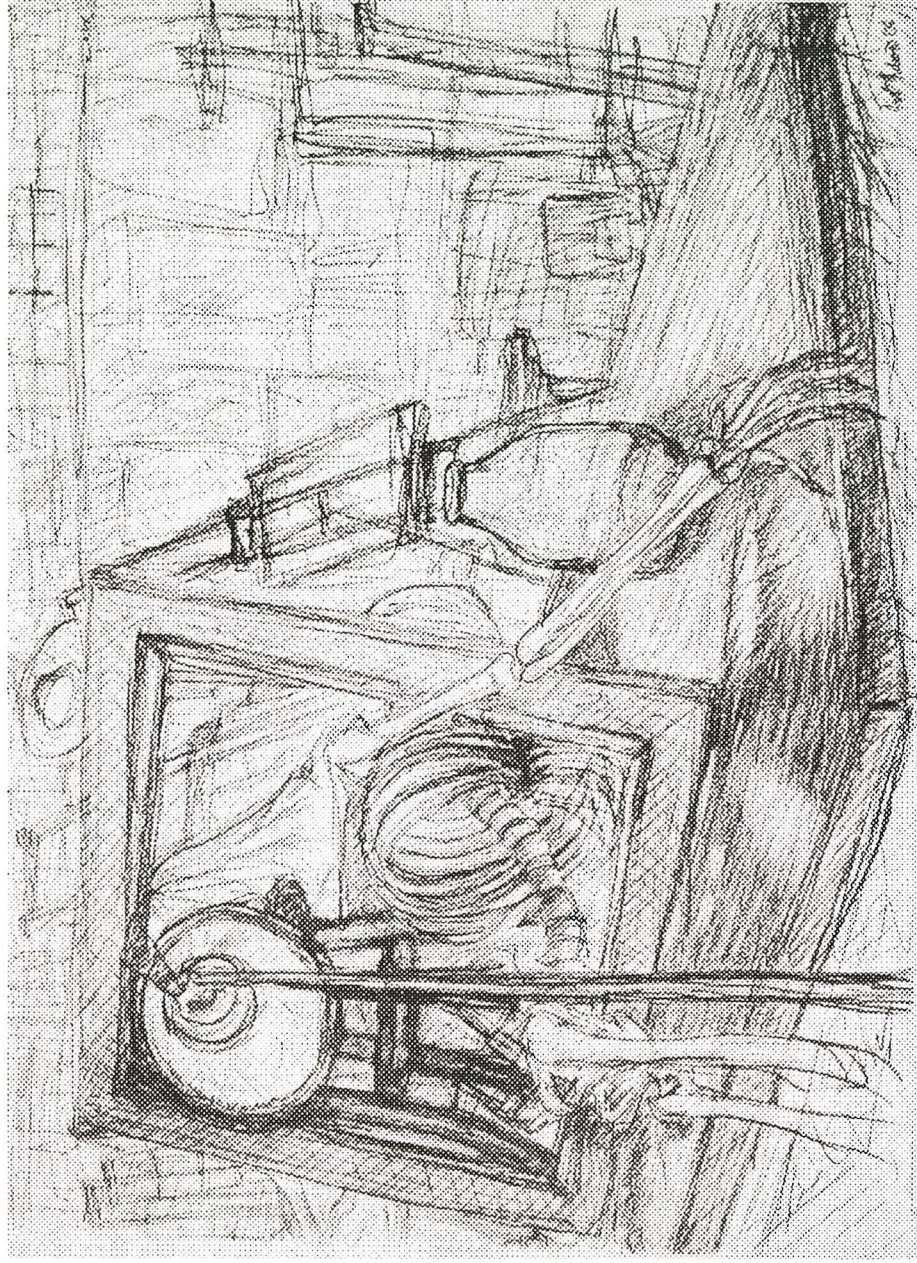
KHIRI



Emily Kruttsch

SELECTION OF MERIT ART

INTERIOR



Kurt Nelson

CHILDLIKE FANTASY



Rebecca Olejnik

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

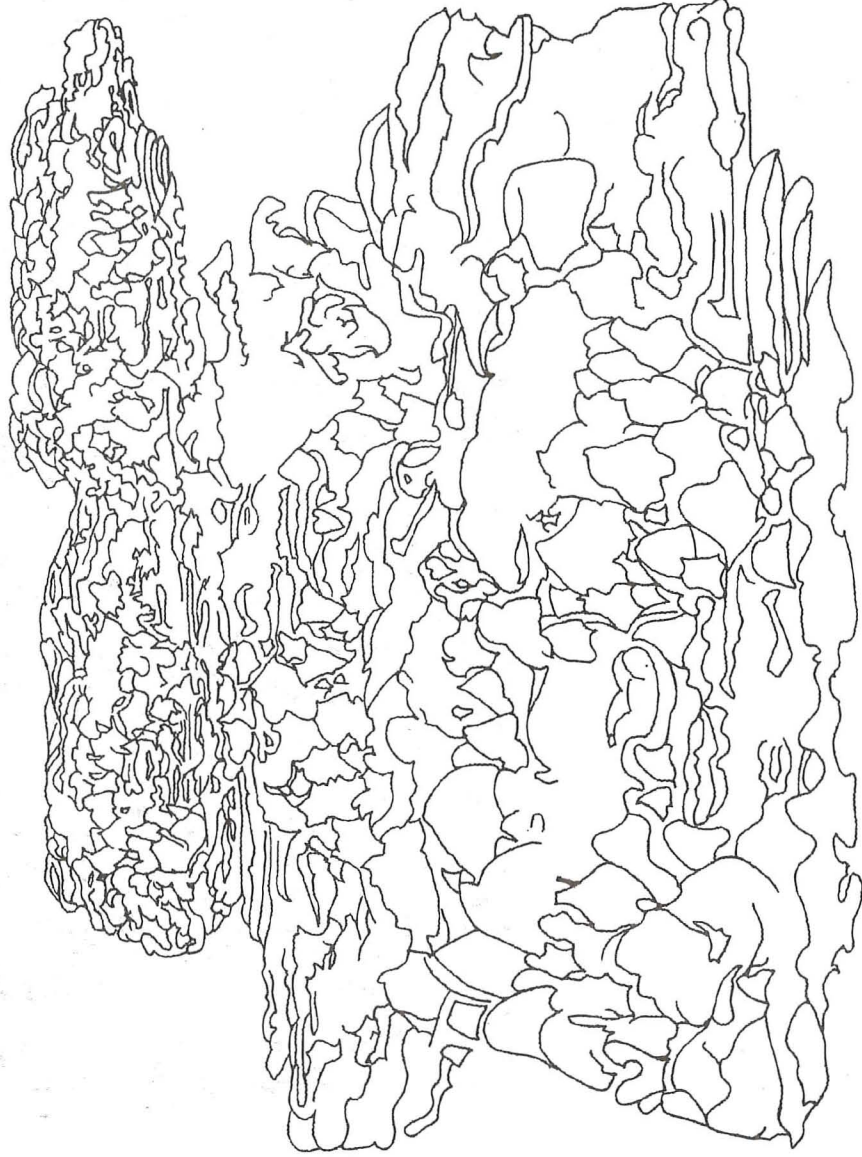
SEASCAPE



Therese Padgham

SELECTION OF MERIT ART

SHORELINE



Therese Padgham

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

SOUTH PACIFIC



Therese Padgham

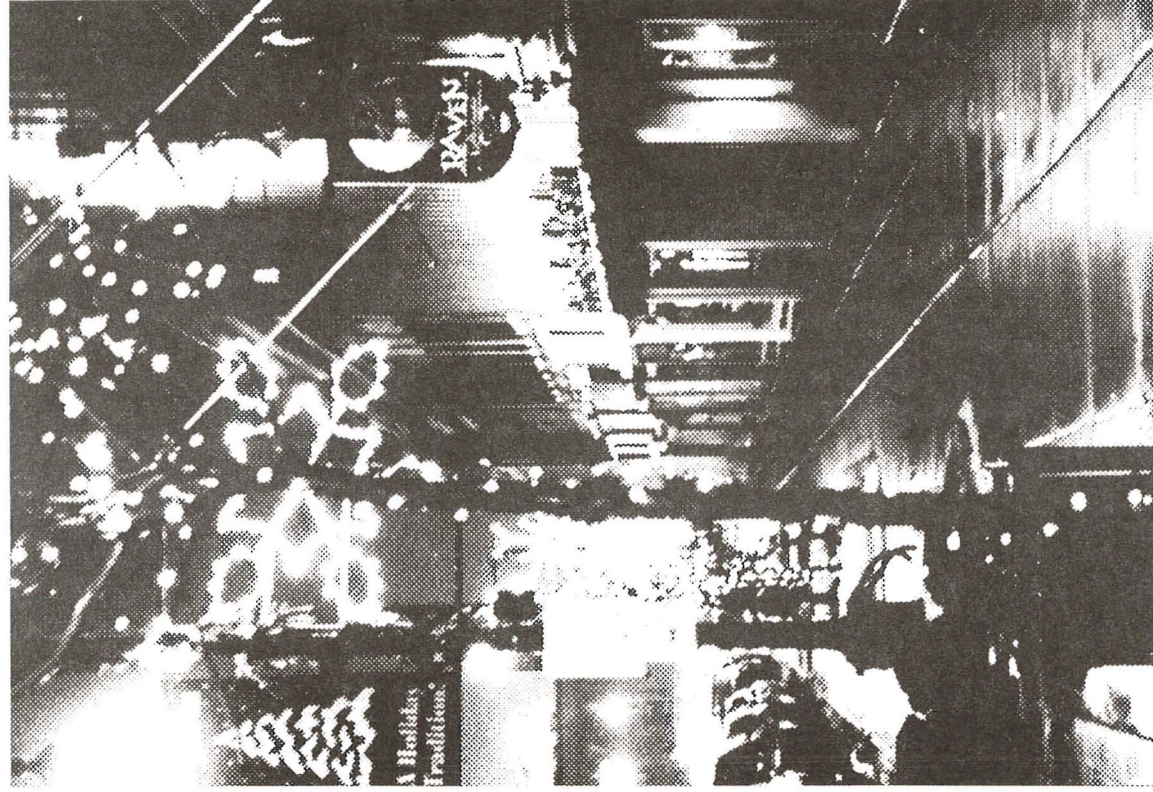
SELECTION OF MERIT ART

OCEANS 8



Karen Peterson

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

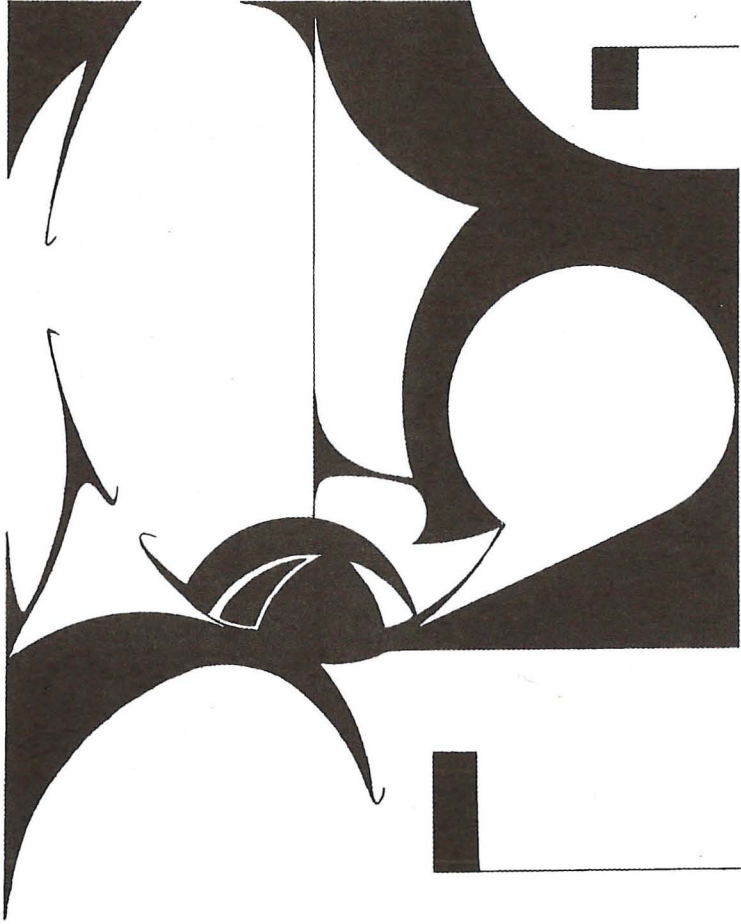


CHRISTMAS
DOWNTOWN

Twana Pinsky

SELECTION OF MERIT ART

MANX



Austin Russell

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

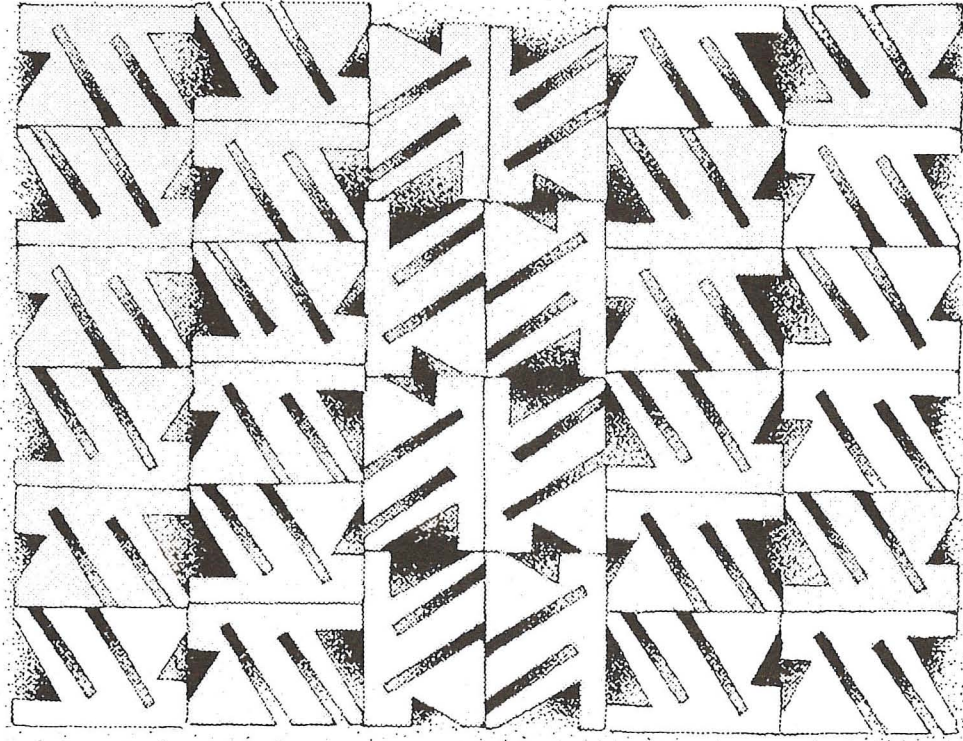
THE GOOD SIDE OF JOSE



Austin Russell

SELECTION OF MERIT ART

STONE AGE



Amanda Stuben

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

NEW LIFE



Paula Vance

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

SERIES OF 3
NO. 1



Rachael Vanderaa

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

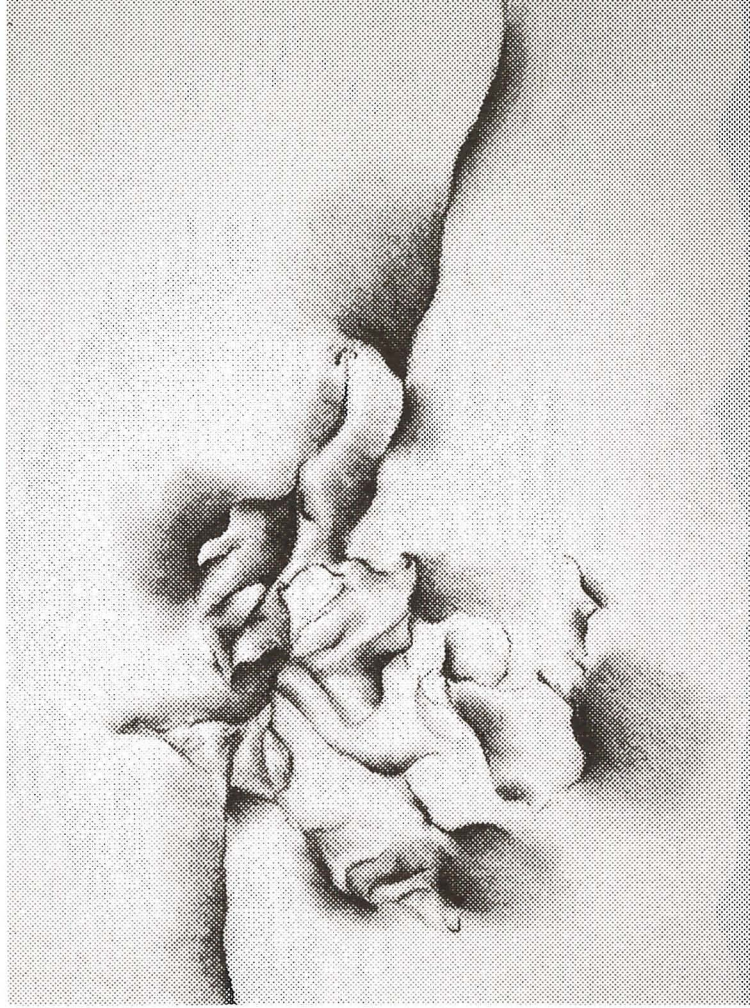
SERIES OF 3
NO. 2



Rachael Vanderaa

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

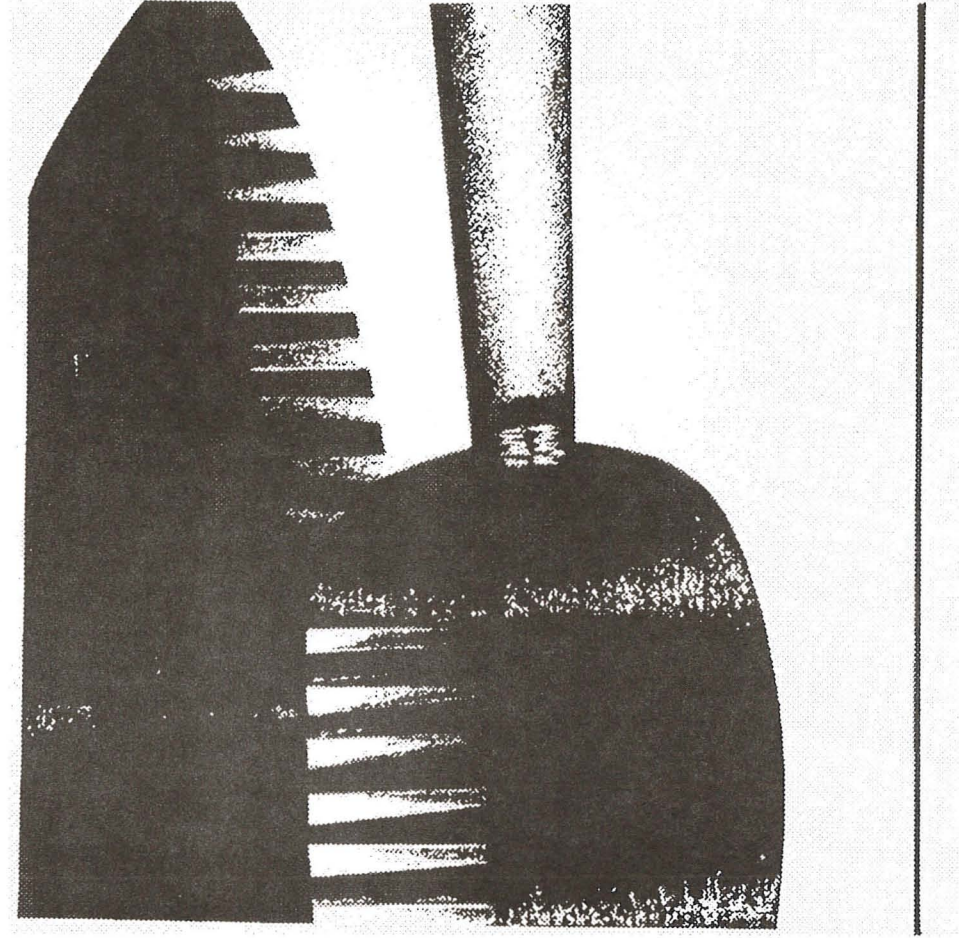
SERIES OF 3
NO. 3



Rachael Vanderaa

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

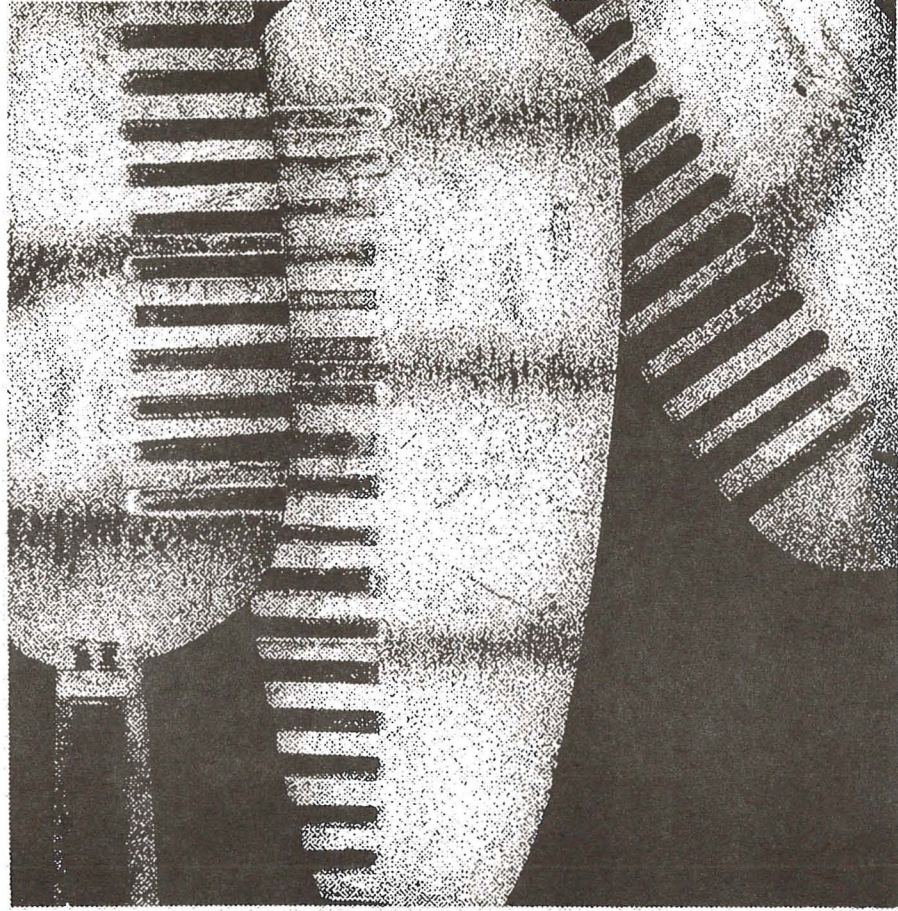
GRANDMA'S SECRET
WEAPONS
NO. 1



Jenny Walker

SELECTION OF MERIT ART

GRANDMA'S SECRET WEAPONS NO. 2



Jenny Walker

SELECTION OF MERIT
ART

GRANDMA'S SECRET
WEAPONS
NO. 3



Jenny Walker

RICHARD COLWELL AWARD

BRIAN'S FLIGHT

Andrew Gorzen

“Brian’s Flight” is a mysterious exploration of the space between the world of our mundane concerns and the one beyond it, where those tasks and responsibilities we busy ourselves with become nothing. The writer takes us into the terrifying claustrophobia of the grave, and then releases us, but not without some unanswered questions—which seems to me the hallmark of the best stories. I was surprised to find myself laughing at Brian’s worries, and then realizing that they were not unlike my own, and feeling strangely ambivalent about his ‘reprieve.’ But the writer has done so much here, drawing me so completely into this story, that I’m as changed as Brian by the end.

—Laura Kasischke

Brian looked up as the chime rang and the “Fasten Your Seatbelt” light came on. He did as he was told.

As the airplane taxied, Brian looked out the window and watched another plane make its grandiose departure, lifting off the ground and rising further into the sky. In a few minutes, his plane then accelerated and lifted off the ground, pushing Brian back in his seat. He looked out his window at the deep purple sky, and then at the multicolored lights of the city below him, the vehicles like small Hot Wheels cars moving around by themselves. The city continued to get smaller, until it was blocked by a surrounding patch of stringy lavender clouds. Soon the clouds became a fluffy floor, above which the plane glided.

Brian turned his attention away from the window. He reached into the duffle bag at his feet and pulled out a worn-out notebook, a paperback, and two textbooks with loose

sheets of paper hanging out from between the pages. He pulled down his tray table and plopped down his haphazard stack of duties, which he had intended to get done in the hotel room. He had an essay to write, five chapters of a novel to read, a history test to study for, and ten calculus problems, all for tomorrow. He could get some of this done on the three-hour plane ride. He would start with the novel, and then work his way to the math problems. Then he could start on the history. Of course, it didn’t help that he hadn’t read the material or taken notes in class. He could get through one section before the plane landed. Then he had an hour to drive home. When he got back, he could finish up the history and write the essay. That would take at least two hours, and by that time his first class would be starting. No time for sleep. He could skip school tomorrow. Then he could sleep until the afternoon, waste the afternoon, and most likely waste the

evening too, so that wouldn't work.

There was nothing he could do but start. He opened up the novel and started to read. He thought about his situation, and how ridiculous he felt flying to Chicago for a four-day conference, and what an honor it was that he got to go, and how everyone was so pleased that he was going to represent his high school and his student council so well, and how he was going to return without taking care of this shit. He still had a long way to go before the end of the semester, and it would only get harder. It was only a matter of time before the illusion of interest he had created would fall apart. By now his eyes had moved across an entire page, so he had to go back to where he started and try again.

He found himself closing the book, setting it down, and closing his eyes. His motion to stay up and do homework was vetoed.

A sudden jerk woke Brian up. He noticed his unfinished business and reflected on the lost time for less than a second before he noticed the violent turbulence. Suddenly, an oxygen mask appeared, dangling in front of him.

It was one of these deals. Brian was now wide awake. He moved his arms quickly, clawing at the oxygen mask so he could start fixing it onto his face.

In the half second it took to stretch the strap around his head, Brian deduced that if the oxygen masks were dropped, he must be in danger, and that since danger is especially dangerous on an airplane, the plane would crash, causing death.

He inhaled through the mask. He pictured his mother, father, and sister, each of them smiling, but in a moment he saw their faces soaking wet with tears, and heard their wailing wishes for more time with Brian. Soon he began to hear a number of compliments about himself, many from people who had never thought much about him before. He imagined his late Aunt Linda—it was now his turn to bring the whole family together, like she did when she died last year. They might even console themselves by imagining Brian's reunion with Aunt Linda and the rest of the departed. Brian didn't know if this reunion would happen, but he wasn't too far from finding out.

He breathed again, the plane rocking him back and forth. What he did know was that he would be leaving some things in disarray. According to the student council bylaws, if the president had to step down for any reason (and this was looking like a good one), the vice president would immediately become president. That meant that Julie would be in charge of everything, and that bitch would no doubt mess everything up and ruin the whole organization. He was at least thankful he wouldn't have to be around for that.

He took another breath, and suddenly he felt still. Why hadn't he thought of that before? There were many consequences to this swift nosedive, but death was the only one that involved him. That disorganized pile of tasks in front of him was no longer a responsibility. The student council was no longer his responsibility. He did not have to do anything more, and yet it would be just like he did. People would assume that he would have continued his valiant efforts, if only he were still alive.

He was seconds away from being relieved of his duties. His presidential duties would soon be gone. His duty to pretend that he still cared about school would be gone too. His duty to find something to do for the rest of his life so that he could make some kind of money and take care of himself—he did not have to worry about that either. Now it was time to relax. It had been a while since he relaxed.

Brian sucked in more oxygen. He was falling—that safety belt kept him from colliding with the chair in front of him, but he was still falling. He went to check his watch (until he realized there was no secretary present, and that somebody else would figure out the exact time at which his meeting adjourned) when a powerful bump pushed him back in his chair. The airplane had collided with the ground.

Brian looked around. He still had consciousness. There was no explosion, but the plane was now rolling along the ground, the friction bouncing everything around more violently than before.

The plane slowed until it stood still. Brian had paid close attention to the flight attendants and knew where the emergency exits were, so he looked back and noticed the doors being opened by other passengers. He followed the crowds of people filing toward the exits. He looked ahead

at the giant inflatable yellow ramps, like the slides he could remember riding down as a kid. He jumped out and slid down, a warm rush hitting him as he slammed into the ground. He had survived—and had an exciting story to tell, too.

Brian stood up and looked around. He was in a lush green field, mostly overcast in the dark blue of night, only illuminated by the flames that now consumed the airplane he was just riding. He could be in Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, or Colorado, or maybe none of the above. He didn't know where he was. It made the moment even more exciting.

Then, he remembered that he left everything on the plane.

A cool, refreshing wind blew, chilling the sweat on his face.

1ST PLACE STORY

CRITIC-AT-LARGE

Benjamin Kramer

“Critic-at-Large” is written with style. The dialogue feels real, and the narrative makes the event of juicing an orange as integral to the story as the larger conflicts. Because of the pace, the charm, and the energy of this writing, and the attention to physical detail, this is a memorable and cinematic story. Along with ‘the critic,’ by the end of it, we’ve traveled an amazing distance from where we began.

—Laura Kasischke

The critic was standing at the sink peeling an orange when his wife came down the stairs. He noticed the way she moved her arms, swinging them in a slightly simian way, gently sliding a hand on the banister. How cute. Three stars.

“Do you have a busy day today?” she asked as she filled her plain white mug with fresh coffee from the pot.

“I have to go to an opening.” He sighed and then yelped as a squirt of citrus erupted from the orange to land in his left eye with a sting. Two stars. “What an awful orange.”

“It juices the same,” she said with a timid smile taking a long sip of coffee.

He winced as he could hear the slurp pound through his skull, his irritated state exaggerating the usually mild irritant.

“Honey,” she said, her sad eyes looking for comfort in the bottom of the mug.

“What?” As if he didn’t know.

“I think we need to talk tonight. About the paperwork.”

“When can you get the boxes?”

“I put in an order. They should be here in plenty of time.”

“When?”

“My sister won’t be up with her truck until two weeks after tomorrow – no, yesterday.”

"That's right." He thought about the new man, the auto executive. Out of the frying pan and into the fire, he thought hating himself for the cliché. He skipped the juicing and quickly bit the orange like an apple, felt the juice run down his chin.

She approached him as he dabbed the escaped juice with a towel and gingerly kissed him on the top of the head. He wrinkled his nose.

"Two stars?" she asked.

He nodded.

He left their – no, his – apartment on the third and fourth floors of the building, rode the elevator to the lobby, scowled at the doorman, stepped on the edge of the sidewalk and took a cab to the opening of a debut art show. The opening was a small affair with tinny discount Christmas lights illuminating the strip-mall gallery. Miniscule pieces of cheese impaled with toothpicks scattered on cheap blue plates were sitting on a rickety table in the center of the room surrounded by cheap wine with the Wal-Mart label hidden by a bright pink bow. A large banner was strung across the room, the kind that could have been designed by an above-average three-year-old with decent technological skills. It read: "Portraits of My Heart: A Show by Artist" in an appalling font made even more unbearable by its multicolored state. One and one-half stars, at the most.

"Aha! And hello there!" The thin man with messy dreadlocks falling out of the sides of his beret waltzed across the room extending his hand towards the critic. "You must be the critic."

"Indeed. And you must be Artist?"

The man broke into a fit of giggles stopping occasionally to snort, slap his thigh or grab the critic's shoulder. When he regained his composure he said "Yes," before leaning in to whisper "but it's not my real name."

"Oh?"

"No! I had it legally changed to Artist after I became an artist following my meeting with the aliens in rehab, of

course."

"Of course you did. I'll just look around then?" The critic glanced around at the art displayed in a tight circle under dim spotlights.

"Sure! But pretend I'm not here although I'll be here if you have questions." Artist trotted off into the shadows as the critic began his work.

This was a debut show filled with all kinds of stupid, obvious art: a painting of a heart separated down the middle with a jagged line and in the middle a Polaroid of the artist standing with a pretty young woman, a found-art sculpture consisting of a muddy leather work-boot in a large pot, a smiley face drawn on a construction-paper heart. Terrible. Half star. He snuck out while Artist was greeting the one other person who had managed to find themselves there.

He was done with his review in an hour having written most of the review on the back of a Kleenex during the ride to his office. He once had a letter from a reader asking if he took pleasure in writing scathing reviews for art shows that would never had been heard of without his review. "Do you like bringing attention to things only to destroy them?" the letter had concluded. The letter was printed in the "Letter to the Editor" section of the paper with his brief response after it: *I am paid to write my opinion. I merely write what I see, and my sight is sharp.*

He printed a copy of his review and started to stand but his editor came into the office catching him in mid-stand.

"Did you get the piece I just submitted?" he asked hovering above his chair before slowly backing into it again.

"Yes, it's just fine. It'll run tomorrow. I hate to do this but, well," the avuncular man quickly said but then paused a moment as if his brain was delayed in delivering the rest of his sentence. "I'll just come right out with it. We have to let you go."

"What?"

"Cutbacks. Death of the newspaper. Internet. Sorry."

"Just like that?"

"I'm afraid so," he said with a frown that settled down somewhere deep within his jowls. "Look. I can't keep you full time. If you wanted to do some freelancing, we can talk. We'll need this office clear by the weekend."

Trailing off, the editor spun and left while making a painfully pedestrian "call me" signal with his hand. As much as the critic hated the outcome he had to admire the speed with which it had happened. He wrinkled his nose.

The critic walked down the sidewalk trying to convince himself that he was respected. The air held a certain kind of late summer waning, a soft chill in the breeze which kicked about the faint smell of leaves ready to fall as they quivered in the motion, holding tenuously steadfast to their ties to the branches. The sun began to cast long shadows, and yet the man walked on. He knew he would reach home before dark, but stole a glance at his watch anyways.

The city was always the most beautiful at this time of day. He loved watching the sun move down among the skyscrapers sending auburn streaks of color across the windows as if the sun was preparing for a landing in the center of the city for the night. (Four stars). But it was a fleeting sight. The auburn slowly turned to a pale blue and then a grey. Still he walked.

The enormity of his situation slowly began to wrap itself around him but he pulled it off. *You can't have your wife leave you and get fired in the same week. It's too clichéd.* He continued walking and thinking and thinking and walking. His building was drawing closer. The light was getting dimmer. The streetlights grew farther apart. He glanced at his watch and when he looked up, a scruffy-looking man stood in front of the door to his apartment building.

"Nice watch," the individual uttered in a slow and scraggly exhale. He ran a hand through his dark, greasy hair and with his other pulled a small gun from the pocket of his ratty coat. "Can you give it to me?" he said mockingly.

Startled, the critic began to remove his watch while glancing up to see his window open. He couldn't see if his ex was inside. "Don't shoot," he implored.

"Faster," the robber said closing the gap between

them and pressing the gun against the critic's ribs so that any passersby would think them old friends catching up, albeit old friend who took radically different paths in life.

"I am going fast."

The robber's laugh was harsh. His scraggly beard came uncomfortably close to the critic's cheek. The man's rancid, stale breath caused him to wrinkle his nose as he handed over his watch.

"Now the wallet," the robber said.

The critic reached for his wallet, pulling back his coat with one hand and reaching in his pocket with the other. In the same motion that brought his wallet in front of him he stomped on the robber's foot. The robber leapt back and shot the critic while looking away then turned, grabbed the wallet and ran off.

The critic lay on the sidewalk. He was cold. He felt like he was holding his breath. He heard footsteps. The doorman had poked out his head and ducked back in to call 911. He heard a hush come over the gathering crowd. He heard a cry, then footsteps drawing nearer. It was his wife. She knelt down next to him. His mouth fell open as he let out his breath which spilled out like cigarette smoke in the cold air. She kissed him on the forehead.

The doorman poked his head back out and shouted "the ambulance is on its way!"

"You'll be okay," she said both for his comfort and hers. "It looks like it only hit your shoulder." She had to let out a small laugh. "Talk about bad timing."

He looked at her with softening vision and wrinkled his nose.

"Two stars?"

2ND PLACE STORY

ALL FOOL'S DAY

Luke Dimick

54 “All Fools Day” is a piece that succeeds by virtue of its voice. The narrator is a fully created, believable character, whose observations of the strangest things become our own by virtue of his wide-eyed wonder, and the way the writer has chosen his impressions with such care. The lesson we’ve learned by the end is at once incredible, and was clear from the outset. The writer has packed a life’s worth of experience into this brief consideration of one strange day.

—Laura Kasischke

I can't wait for him to fall into my trap. My brother Scotty gets me really bad every year with an April Fools' prank. I guess we take the "holiday" pretty seriously. It all started when he hid in the closet and jumped out at me, like, ten years ago. The next year I shook up a soda can and handed it to him. He got soaked. Back then, when we were little, the tricks were pretty simple. Then they started getting more elaborate. A couple years ago I put Saran Wrap across the toilet seat. That ended pretty messy for him. He was so mad! What a sucker. He redeemed himself the next year though by putting itching powder in my underwear. But this year there is no way he's going to upstage me.

Earlier, when he was at work at the shooting range, I loosened a wire in the outlet that Scotty always uses. He's

a smalltime mechanic who works out of the driveway. Every night when it gets dark outside he comes inside and plugs an extension cord into the kitchen outlet for his shop light. That way he can finish up his extra work after dark. Tonight, when Scotty goes to use the plug, it'll give him a little shock. It's going to be great. I even tested it out on myself to make sure it would work. Unfortunately, I'm going to miss the show because I have to work tonight and then I'm going to the shooting range to try out the new gun that Scotty got me for my birthday. This might work to my advantage though; it will give him some time to cool off. He'll probably be pretty mad, shocked even, but payback's a bitch.

I walked outside and down the driveway when I saw my brother's legs sticking out from under the car. He was

fixing a gas leak on a Buick Century for a buddy of his.

"Hey, I'm heading off to work," I said casually.

"All right. Are you still going to the range after work?" he asked, his upper half still underneath the car.

"Yeah, I'll be home after that though. It won't take me too long." I tried to keep a straight face when I said "It looks like it's getting pretty dark out here."

"I know. I'm going to have to plug in my light pretty soon. This gas leak is giving me all sorts of problems."

Delighted with how my plan was going and with the thought of making my brother look like a fool, I said bye and got in my car.

I work at the supermarket as a cart pusher. It's one of the most boring jobs imaginable, but tonight I kept thinking of Scotty getting shocked and the time flew by. When my shift was over I ran to my car. I was going to go to the range but I can't resist stopping home for a minute and making fun of my foolish brother. I'm going to run in and yell "April Fools" right in his face.

I sped down the road, making the 10-minute drive from work in 5 minutes, a new personal record. I turned the corner and saw flashing lights down my road. A fire truck, ambulance, and two police cars were parked on the street near our house. Smoke was rising into the night sky, but I couldn't tell where it was coming from. I flew up to the house and slammed on the brakes, screeching my car to a halt. The smoke was coming from my house, or what was left of it. Our white, two-bedroom house was completely burned to the ground.

"Oh my God!" I thought. "Did my prank burn down the house?" The fire was already out and the firemen were busy looking through the rubble. The house that I grew up in, the place that housed all my belongings and memories was gone.

I turned off the car and ran to the nearest police officer.

"Hey, I'm the owner of this house!" I screamed, trying not to sound frantic.

"Ok son, try to stay calm." He said routinely, starring me right in the eyes. His nametag read Deputy Hexum.

"How old are you? Where are your parents?"

"I'm 22. My parents died five years ago in a car accident," I said crazily. I looked around trying to find Scotty. I expected him to run up to me when I got out of the car but I didn't see him anywhere.

"Me and my brother Scotty live here now. Where is Scotty?" I asked, my voice quivering.

"Hold on." Hexum turned around and said quietly into his radio "I need a grief counselor on the scene right away."

Panic struck me instantly as I remembered one of the last things my brother said to me: "This gas leak is giving me all sorts of problems."

Holding back the tears, I asked Hexum what caused the fire.

"We're not exactly sure yet but we think it was electrical. It was faulty wiring I suspect."

I started crying. My stupid prank started the fire. I accidentally murdered my gasoline soaked brother. The grief counselor arrived and told me what I already knew, that my brother had died in the fire. I killed him, and I wasn't going to tell a soul.

The next couple days I spent preparing the funeral arrangements. Scotty had already arranged that if anything ever happened to him his money and the property were to be left with me. I used the money to give him a proper burial. It wasn't a lot of money, but it was enough for a small funeral and an even smaller headstone. It was the least I could do. Not too many people came to the funeral since we didn't have any family that lived close. The debris from the fire is cleaned up now and my station wagon sits on the property. I've been living in it because I really have nowhere else to go. A day after the funeral, my first day back to work, I quit my job. I couldn't take it anymore.

That day at work people were leaving the carts all over the place. It's like they were out to get me. I was busy pushing a line of carts up towards the front of the store when I saw this woman wedge a cart between two cars. I finally snapped.

I ran up to the woman and said politely "Excuse me Ma'am. I have a question for you."

"Ok, what is it?" she said, looking annoyed.

"How hard is it to put the cart where it is supposed to go? How much extra time and energy would it take to put the cart in the corral?" The woman looked horrified. "Are you in that much of a hurry? Are you so important that you can't put a cart away? Do you observe any common courtesy?" I screamed "You are everything that's wrong with the world."

Then the woman yelled back, "You can't talk to me like that. I pay your wages by shopping at this store."

"How would you like if I came to your work and made your job harder?" I knew it would cost me my job but the anger just flowed out of me. I had no control over my words. She started walking towards the entrance where groups of people were flowing in and out of the store. I followed her, cut in front of her, and got right in the woman's face.

"It's like you want to make my life a living hell." The other shoppers stared on in shock.

"I want to speak to your manager right now. All these people saw what you said to me," the woman shouted back furiously.

"Good you can tell my manager that I quit. He can take this job and shove it." Then I stormed off towards home, leaving the place for good. I knew that I overreacted but I didn't care. It felt good to let out some steam.

I'm glad I quit, but now I have no food and I've run out of money. There's a soup kitchen downtown on 5th Street so I'm going to have to resort to eating there. I got out of my car and walked the half-mile to the soup kitchen for an early lunch. I always walked these days, for one, it cleared my head, but really I have no money for gas and have to conserve the quarter of a tank left in the thing. I walked into the soup kitchen; it's a small, run down place. There are a couple tables set up with an old, homeless man sitting at one of them eating what looks like tomato soup. I'm so embarrassed to be here. I never thought I'd have to come to a place like this, but I was hungry. I put my shame aside and walked up to the counter to grab a bowl.

"The tomato's tasty, try that kind," the homeless man yelled at me, practically at the top of his lungs.

"Oh, don't mind Walt. He's a little out there," the woman dishing out the soup said.

"Ok, I guess I'll have the tomato," I said quietly. The

lady handed me a bowl and I turned around to find a seat.

"Take a seat over here next to me. It's not too often we get a new face around here," Walt said. He was an odd looking man, probably in his sixties, with white hair and a white beard. He had on a pair of old jeans and a flannel shirt, with an oversized tan coat completing the outfit. I didn't want to offend the guy so I went and sat next to him.

"What's your name buddy?" he asked.

"Jake," I said softly.

"Mine's Walter. But you can call me Walt."

I started to eat my soup, ignoring Walt and he continued eating his. I wasn't in the mood to make new friends so we just sat in awkward silence. Finally, Walt spoke up.

"Well, Jake, what brings you here on this fine day?" he asked, just making conversation.

"It's a long story. You don't want to know," I said.

"Come on now, you can tell me. Don't be embarrassed. Were both in the same boat here."

"No, I really don't want to talk about it," I said annoyed. Even though I didn't really have anyone to talk to since Scotty died. He wasn't only my brother, but my best and only friend.

"Come on kid, tell me. I'm bored out of my mind over here."

"Fine," I said reluctantly. This old homeless, probably crazy, man was about the only person I had to talk to.

"I accidentally killed my brother from an April Fools' prank gone wrong, only I didn't have the guts to admit it. I burned down the house, I quit my job, and I'm living in a station wagon. I have no money, no food, and every time I have to use the bathroom I go to the public one in the park." I just gushed it all out. I had to tell someone. Walt's facial expression didn't change at all. He just continued slurping his soup, like what I said was nothing out of the ordinary.

"Well, why did you quit your job then?" He finally asked casually.

"I couldn't take it anymore."

"At least you had a job. What kind of job was it?"

"I was a cart pusher at the supermarket. All I had to do was push the carts into the store. It was really repetitive."

"Well at least it paid the bills, kid."

"My brother Scotty pretty much paid the bills. He owned a firing range and he took care of me ever since our parents died when I was a junior in high school. Scotty had enough money to make the house payments and I gave him money whenever I could. When he died he was 24 with a world of potential. I'm 22 and have nothing left."

"But why did you quit your job?"

"Because people never put the carts in the cart corrals, it made me furious. It would've made my job twenty times easier if people would just make the slightest extra effort to put the cart in the corral, where it was supposed to go. Instead I had to roam around the parking lot dodging cars and grabbing random carts all day. People left dirty diapers and garbage in the carts too, which I had to clean out. The anger just built and built in me every day. I'm pretty stressed, as you can see, and Sunday's are always busy at the store, so yesterday I finally cracked. I worked there for five years, it was bound to happen sooner or later"

Walt laughed, some soup dripped out of his mouth. "What happened?" I told him the story about how I snapped at the woman and stormed off. "Right on" Walt yelled. "You can't let people screw you over like that. I never did."

By then we had both finished our soup so we decided to go for a little walk. Neither of us had anything better to do. Walt filled me in on how he became homeless. To make a long story short, he "made a lot of mistakes" as he put it. He actually gambled and drank all his money away, two serious mistakes. He was a nut, but I kind of bonded with the guy. I haven't been myself lately anyway. I told him all about me and my brother's past. About how different we were. About how he owned a firing range and took care of me. About all the good times we had and about the April Fools' pranks.

"I wish I could tell Scotty I'm sorry," I said, trying to hold back the tears.

"I'm sure he knows. He's in a better place," he said, pulling a flask from his coat pocket and taking a drink from it for the fifth time in the last fifteen minutes.

"You know what's really been eating at me though? Why didn't Scott prank me on April Fool's Day? I know he had something planned. I just know it."

"He was probably going to set a trap when you were gone at work."

We walked for a while longer before Walter drunkenly stumbled onto a bench. I sat down beside him, facing the 5th Street Bank that was across the street.

"What are you going to do now kid?" Walt said, slurring his speech, sounding drunk.

"I don't know. All I have is a station wagon, some clothes that survived the fire packed in a duffle bag, and a gun in the glove compartment," I said, in a trance.

"Well, I guess all you can really do is rob that bank. You have a gun, a duffle bag, and a car and the bank's right by the freeway. All you need now is a ransom note," Walt said joking.

I sat in silence and thought about it for a minute, staring at the bank. He might have been crazy, or drunk, or both, but it was a brilliant idea.

"That might be crazy enough to work," I said, my mood suddenly changing.

"Whoa, wait. I was just kidding. Why don't you join the Army or go to college or something?"

"I don't want to die in the Army. Are you crazy?" I laughed to myself because he was kind of crazy. "And how am I supposed to pay for college? I'm not going to survive long enough to make it through college."

"Don't you have some family or friends you can live with?"

"No, I need to take some direction in my life. I depended on my brother my whole life and look where that got me. I need action."

"Don't do it. Trust me, it's a bad idea. You're not making any sense. I think you've gone a little psycho from losing your parents and brother and all that."

"No, it's a great idea. Think about it. I have everything I need to do it." I was thinking out loud to him. "It's foolproof. I'll be in and out as quick as I can. I've been in there before. That bank doesn't have a security guard on duty. It's an older bank and I'm sure it doesn't have a fancy alarm system. It's probably just an under the counter button that triggers the alarm. There's no real threat in a small town like this for something better."

"Ok, but what if you get caught?"

"Well, that would be just fine with me. If I get arrested I'll be all set in prison. I'll get three meals a day, clean clothes, hot showers, and a warm bed. I won't be living like a king but it'll be better than being homeless. I'm still a young guy so I'll get out of jail with plenty of time to live a complete life. The government helps ex-prisoners start a new life."

"Jail is not all it's cracked up to be kid. I've done some time and it wasn't glamorous."

I ignored him. Nothing was going to change my mind.

"But if I happen to get out of that bank with the money, things will be a whole lot different. I can take the money and start over. Settle down somewhere, find a wife, have some kids, and just lead a normal life. If all goes as planned, I'll be able to live a life great enough for me, you, and my brother!"

"Hell, maybe it's not such a bad idea. I don't know."

I looked down at my watch. It was 2:30. If I was going to do this thing I had to go get ready.

"I gotta go get ready. Today's the day, Walter." We stood up and I shook his hand. "Thanks for everything. If I get away with the money, I'll come back tomorrow to the soup kitchen and tell you how it went. If I'm not here tomorrow, I'm probably in prison. Thanks for everything."

I ran down the street and jogged the mile back towards the lot where my car is waiting for me. I feel energized and excited. I'm a little nervous because deep down I really don't want to go to jail, but Scotty looking over me gives me all the confidence in the world. On the way back home I formed the plan in my head. I'll take the duffle bag, the gun, and the note and drive to the bank. Walk in calmly, tell the banker that I need to make a withdrawal, and hand her the note demanding money. I'll give her the bag, she'll fill it up, and I'll walk out before anyone knows the difference. I finally reached my property and got into the car, where I wrote the ransom note. Without hesitation I started it up and drove the short drive to the bank. Today was the day that would change my life forever. Nothing could stop me.

I arrived at the bank and parked the car in front of the doors, positioning myself for a clean getaway facing the interstate. I nervously opened the glove compartment where the pistol, the 9mm handgun Scotty gave me for my birthday,

waited for me. The same handgun that I was going to test at the range on April Fool's Day. It was loaded and ready, sitting right where I left it on top of the gun case. I never kept the gun in the case, I wanted it handy for easy access. I only used the case when I went to the firing range. This gift would serve me well. Thanks Scott, even after death you're always here for me.

I looked at my sweaty reflection in the rearview mirror and said to myself "I'm ready. Just get in, get the money, and get out as quick as you can. You know the plan." I looked down at my watch, it was just after 3:30 p.m. and at this time on a Monday afternoon the bank wasn't very busy. I stared into the bank and saw a short line of people waiting. I concealed the gun in my pants, tucking it in the waistband against the small of my back. The gun is cold and gives me the chills. I grabbed the note and duffle bag and stepped out of the car. I walked in casually and stepped in line behind three others. There was a man in a business suit, a woman wearing sweats, and a teenaged guy ahead of me. A second later a large biker walked in and took his place in line behind me. I hope I don't have to hurt any of them but I will if I have to. I looked down at the paper and silently read over the note one more time:

"This is a robbery. Empty your drawer and grab as much money from the safe as fast as you can and put it in this bag. Keep your hands where I can see them. I have a gun and I will not hesitate to shoot you."

I started to feel anxious as the line shortened and the people in front of me took their places at the counter.

"I can help you right here" a friendly voice said smiling and waving me over. The teller is a beautiful young woman who couldn't have been much older than me. She's tall and slim with straight brown hair put up elegantly on top of her head. She looks so innocent that I almost abort my mission, but I've come too far to turn back now. My fate had been decided. I walked up to the counter and looked at the teller's nametag. It said Dee.

"What can I help you with today?" she asked in a welcoming tone.

"Hi Dee." I hesitated with the note in my hand. I

looked her in the eyes and finally said, "I need to make a withdrawal." With my hand shaking I lifted the note and was about to put it on the counter when the biker that was in line behind me screamed.

"Listen up, this is a robbery. Just do as I say and no one will get hurt." I looked behind me to see the biker pointing a gun in the air towards the ceiling. "I need each banker to empty their drawers and put the money in this bag. We don't need to get the police involved so you keep your hands off that alarm and lets get this done fast." The biker scanned the room and pointed the gun at each person. "All of you can just get face down on the ground and I will be out of your way shortly." He threw the bag to the first teller and she started emptying her drawer as the customers dropped quickly to the floor.

I backed away towards the door in disbelief. This is my bank. I was going to rob it. This is my plan. I feel sick to my stomach. All my preparation had gone to waste. What are the odds that someone else would rob this bank on this same day at this time? Ninety billion to one? How do I have such bad luck? Why can't anything go right in my life? I shook with rage.

"I said get down on the ground, boy. I'm not gonna hurt you if you listen to me, so you can stop shaking like a little puppy dog," the biker said to me. At that moment I saw Dee reach under the counter to trigger the silent alarm, a mistake that just might cost her her life. The biker grabbed the bag from the young teller and pressed the gun up against her forehead. Dee was shaking violently and screamed when the gun touched her head. "I guess this money was more important to you than your life." The biker fired a warning shot into the air. "Now I don't have very much time so things are going to have to get messy." I was still frozen in horror. I had one thing to look forward to in life and this biker took it away. I no longer cared about the money or jail or anything else. All I cared about was getting my revenge on this man. I pulled the gun out from the small of my back.

"Put the gun on the floor or I swear to God I'll blow a hole through your head!" I screamed. He turned around quickly and I had him in my sights. "I was supposed to

rob this bank. I was supposed to use that money. I was supposed to turn my life around. Now put the gun down and give me that bag or I'll scatter your brains." I let the adrenalin take over. The biker dropped his gun on the floor and threw the bag over. I pulled my trigger, aiming for the biker's head. The gun fired loudly but I must've missed and he jumped down behind the counter. I fired the gun again. Then again. No bullets were coming out. I grabbed the bag of money and ran for the door. The biker got up and fired a shot, striking me in the leg before I could exit the bank. I hobbled outside screaming in pain and opened the passenger door of my car. My leg quickly went numb. Before I could jump in two more shots came from inside the bank. One bullet zipped by my head, shattering the passenger window. The other landed deep in my left shoulder. I dropped inside the car, my head on the seat facing the floor. I won't go down without a fight. I'll fight until the very end, even though I'm starting to blackout and the pain is indescribable.

With sirens screaming in the distance I opened the case and the compartment that held the spare clip. There's a note wrapped around the clip and I immediately recognized Scotty's handwriting. The only time I ever opened the compartment was at the firing range after using my first clip. I grabbed the note and read it quickly.

"Hey Idiot,

Did you have fun shooting a gun filled with blanks? I bet you were real accurate. If you actually kept your gun unloaded and in the case my plan wouldn't have worked. Pop, Pop goes your gun but no bullets come out. Ha Ha. Enjoy your second clip.

April Fool's,
Scotty"

The biker ran out of the bank, grabbed the bag of money and took off before I could muster up the strength to put in the second clip. By the time I finally put the clip in I heard the roar of a motorcycle and the screeching of sirens. I couldn't even raise the damn thing though and I fell out of the car. With nothing left to do I just laid on the pavement and stared straight at the sky, wondering what would happen first: I'd bleed to death or if help would come. At this point I

didn't care. I thought about Scotty and what a great prank it would have been had I actually gone to the range that night and fired the blanks. I thought about how we were even now, because his prank would probably end up killing me too. With my vision fading, the last thing I saw before I passed out was a police officer hovering over me. His badge read Deputy Hexum.

I woke up to the sound of my heart monitor beeping. I was alive, but I knew that tough times were ahead. Would I go to jail? Most certainly, I suspect, but that was fine with me. As I said before, it's better than being homeless. Maybe I can spin the story to where I was the hero, saving Dee from the horrible bank robber. Or maybe I'll be sent to the loony bin.

With my future uncertain, I closed my eyes and tried to imagine how life would have turned out without April Fool's Day. A day that brought together and almost murdered two brothers, with two different pranks, on two different days. You almost got me Scotty, but my prank was better.

KATHY NICKERSON AWARD

BATHING HILDA

Jessica Bonner

I was seventeen and I was terrified, the day I first bathed Hilda. I drove quickly, uncomfortable, and anxious through down town Port Huron that afternoon, cursing my car and pleading with my air conditioner to work "just this once." The familiar routine of high school pulled from under my feet I did not truly anticipate enjoying this new job. My mother pressed me to become a home health aid for the company through which she was also employed, comforting me by promising she would train me personally, and assuring me that a more rewarding job than this did not exist. I did not believe her. Sure, anything was better than the grease pit I escaped from but I sincerely doubted I had "the right stuff" to be a visiting aid. My mother is disgustingly cheerful and confident, and I have a tendency toward

sarcasm, and shyness in new situations.

As I drove I ran through every scenario of possible failure in my head in vivid and exaggerated detail. "I'm seventeen years old; I can barely take care of myself let alone have another life completely dependent on me!" I was unafraid of the vomit, the blood, and the feces that I would surely encounter with this occupation, but I was paralyzed with panic at the thought of a misconnection. From what my bosses told me this woman was eighty five, "what in the name of God am I going to talk about with an eighty five year old woman?" I was horror stricken that she might find me inadequate in my youth; I just knew she wouldn't allow me to bathe her because she may be ashamed or embarrassed having "a child" care for her, and was

dreading my own embarrassment and naiveté when that time came about as well. Modesty was always held dear in my family and the thought of gazing upon a stranger, an aged stranger's nakedness nonetheless struck me with dilapidating apprehension. It was too late now though; I had signed up for this case and "I sure as hell wasn't going back to McDonalds."

Her driveway was narrow; the modular home community she lived in did not leave much space allotted for parking or yards. Regardless, most of the residents could not drive nor wander out of doors anyway. The tiny porch was pleasant enough, where the others surrounding loomed forward in their blankness, Hilda's small stoop laughed with hanging flower baskets of purple and pink. A shadow of a smile was allowed on my mouth by my anxious brain as a timid knock announced my presence. Realizing that she probably couldn't hear my pathetic excuse of a rap on her door, I forced myself to give a more assertive proclamation of my arrival.

62 If I had pressed my ear to the door I, perhaps, would have heard the raspy "come in dear" more clearly. I heard it anyway and crept inside like a burglar, as if she were still sleeping. My feet barely made any noise as they made contact with the cushy, cream carpet while blindly navigating through the alien home. Finger paintings made by who I could only assume were her grandchildren were lovingly framed and lined the halls to her room where she lay in bed.

There she was, Hilda, a withered frame in a grandiose feather bed, beaming a smile that I could honestly say was the warmest welcome I had ever received in its genuine offering. I smiled shyly back and whispered something of a hello. Hilda giggled openly; propped herself up on her elbows and chastised me good naturedly,

"Now how am I supposed to hear that with all these wrinkles in my ears?"

I apologized and offered a more forth coming "good morning."

"That's more like it sweet pea, you must be my helper Jessie."

It surprised me how she knew I was used to being addressed as Jessie, rather than Jessica; my company

couldn't have told her, for they prided themselves on professionalism and would have no use for such nick-name nonsense. No, she just said it on her own, preferring a more personal title for me. So simple a thing immediately put me at greater ease and I began what would become our morning routine.

I first noticed her bedside commode was full; jumping into what my training held I should do, I immediately dumped the urine and sterilized the tiny toilet.

"You don't waste time do you?" she laughed, "bustling about with my pee bucket."

I was shocked at her brashness, "I'm sorry," I offered.

"Don't be sorry, come sit and chat" and she patted the space on the bed directly beside her. I sat down lightly, afraid that if I plunked down I might jostle her out of bed, and she rested her hand on mine.

"Tell me, Jessie dear, are you hungry?"

"Oh no I'm fine, thank you." I ejected quickly shaking my head in the negative, though admittedly I was, I woke extra early as one tends to do when heading to a new job and breakfast seemed a decade ago.

"Well then," she sighed, "perhaps by the time you get me squeaky clean and dressed I will be able to coax you into a cinnamon bun," and she winked knowingly. I laughed and played along, pretending she would have to shove the cinnamon bun into my mouth and force me to chew.

We spent the next half hour discussing our families, tittering at their similarities, while I tidied up her room and picked out an outfit for her to wear that afternoon, a pink and green jump suit with tulips and daisies on the front.

"Before I can put that on I'll need a shower, dear," she reminded me, and my heart dropped. I had forgotten my initial fear in my enjoyment of her conversation and I stared, simply, at her.

"Help me up" she instructed, and I complied, rushing to her side, all business and efficiency again.

"Take off my pajama pants please while I take off my shirt." It became apparent to me that it was only I suffering from shyness.

"Okay."

There she was, Hilda, a withered frame, now naked as Eve and without the protection of her feather bed. I led her by the arm to her adjoining bathroom and lowered her into the menacing grey shower chair that she tried to make more jubilant with colored sponges tied by the string.

"There we are," I said.

"Yes ma'am, let's hop to it," she cackled comfortably.

This, our first bath time encounter, I mechanically went through the motions, cleansing her body with minimal if any conversation, trying to avert my eyes as much as possible. I muttered silent prayers of thanks that at the very least, she, was unafraid, knowing full well that the same aging would happen to my body eventually, and she enjoyed the fact that she still indeed existed in body. She chuckled and made jokes all the while to make up for my lack of communication. I towed her dry and dressed her, relieved to return to our comfortable state of clothed chatter. We shared a breakfast of cinnamon buns and I knew as we ate, that as time went on I would begin to enjoy our times in the bathroom as well as our times out. I would grow to see the showers I gave her through her eyes as just another thing I should consider myself blessed to be able to do. I helped her into her living room recliner where she would spend her day, reading and waiting hopefully for the visitors that perhaps, this day, would come. I checked on her once more before I left.

There she was, Hilda, a strong woman I loved.

1ST PLACE ESSAY

VANISHED COMFORT ZONE

Monalisa Zewatski

64

Clear blue skies and the V formation of the birds are in sight. The wind sends the fresh smell of the St. Clair River up my nostrils. It's natural to want to inhale slowly and enjoy the scent. My heart beats a little faster as I go out farther with each stride. *Three miles down, five more to go*, I cheer myself on. As I wipe the sweat off my brow, I hear two freighters say "hello" to each other with their horns. One is going south, the other, to the north. Colorful flags from different nations are displayed on their decks.

M-29 divides the Algonac State Park from the St. Clair River. Jogging on the highway is a gift I've always treasured. Northbound, the breath-taking body of water sits on the right hand side. When the sun shines on it a certain way, it sparkles like scattered, tiny diamonds. A few

fishermen standing at the shore cast their lines hoping to score a large fish. If they're unsuccessful, it's not a big deal. That's what fish stories are for!

On the left hand side, a lively campground is covered with lush, green grass. Families and friends sit around the camp fire, exchanging smiles and laughter. One can easily guess when the heart-warming stories are told and practical jokes acted upon. Watching people helps me forget the effort I am putting in as my feet pound on the pavement.

Sometimes, I take the other path, the trail inside the state park. When everything is still, I may see a deer or two. Wiggly little garter snakes can be frightful, little creatures. There's no warning when they decide to cross

the trail. They've made me jump every now and then. I have felt as though I needed to back track and look for my heart because it seemed as if it leapt out of my chest. Magnificent wild flowers give life to the surroundings, as well. Without them, the picturesque scene would be incomplete. There used to be plenty of tall trees that provided shade. However, because of the Emerald Ash Borers, many had to be cut down.

Despite the loss of trees, the Algonac State Park has a powerful force that draws people in an instant. It is a place that one can rapidly fall in love with. It is exhilarating to jog by there. Somehow, it has a magical way of making me feel free. Until one day...

"I'm so excited! I can finally call myself an official college student. After waiting 15 years, I have arrived," I told my friend, Michelle Thomas. Governor Granholm made my dream a reality when she signed a piece of legislation called *No Worker Left Behind*. It gave my family hope when we found out my tuition would be paid for. Through hard work and perseverance, we may have a chance of living a life that has less financial concerns. Maybe we'll be able to go to a movie theater and see the latest film without worrying if we'll have enough money for the water bill.

We've had terrible luck for the past year. My husband, who has worked in the automotive industry for a very long time, lost his job. He had been the sole provider for the last eight years. The economy was in good shape then; he worked over-time hours. We decided that it would be best if I stayed home for the children. Besides taking a part-time job for a few months, I had been a homemaker. Like many families, however, we found ourselves buried in debt very quickly.

Fortunately, my husband has found a new job. But his lower pay and our enormous bills make it almost impossible to survive. That is why we are grateful that I've been given the opportunity to attend college and gain the skills needed to acquire a good paying job. I chose to pursue a degree in civil architectural technology. President-elect Obama recently made an announcement that there would be 2.5 million jobs related to road and building construction and repair in the year 2011. It sounds

promising. I've been questioning whether or not I made the right choices in a field of study for my short-term plan. Luckily, the doubt has been eased. Eventually, I hope to become a civil engineer. That is my dream. Isn't that what this country is all about—making dreams come true? The United States of America is the land of opportunity. Someday, my family will not struggle financially.

I've been working diligently this semester and reminding myself to take it one step at a time. Everything I do at this moment will have an impact on my future. Each little quiz, speech presentation or essay counts. It is important to attend all my classes frequently. I've made it a goal to set an example for my children.

On November 17, 2008, on my way to school, reality slapped me on the face. A dark cloud hovered above me. Something had set in too clearly and found myself thinking, "Am I going to make it to school on time regularly? Is this going to interfere with the quality of my attendance? Will I have to leave thirty minutes earlier than usual just in case..."

Two years ago, while I was happily jogging along the Algonac State Park and feeling free as a bird, I was stopped. Every ounce of positive energy was drained from me. A white van with a U.S. government license plate blocked my path. The driver, dressed in uniform, stepped out of the vehicle and approached me. He asked, "Where do you live? What are you doing here? Are you a U.S. citizen? What's your name?" He went on further by saying, "The reason I stopped you is that you were jogging too long. I saw you jog earlier, and I'm still seeing you jog now." After the interrogation, he left. I was shaking because no one had ever blocked my way before. Never had I been stopped and questioned about my identity. The eight mile route seemed like a hundred that day. I could not wait to get home. I was very scared and quit using the same path for an extended period of time.

It took me over a year to get over the fear of being stopped. I finally accepted that it was an isolated incident. I started to feel free again during my morning jogs and allowed myself to enjoy the coolness of the breeze as it touched my face. I listened to the birds chirping and

the frogs croaking. My confidence returned. This was the freedom that I once knew.

However, the feeling only lasted a year. On November 17, 2008, my American spirit was crushed. While driving along M-29 in Marysville, I saw red and blue flashing lights behind me. I knew exactly what it meant and pulled over onto the side of the road. Since my window was inoperable, I opened the door slightly to be able to hear the officer.

"May I help you?" I asked.

"Are you from Algonac?"

"Yes."

"...Is this your last name?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to work?"

"No. I am going to college. I attend St. Clair County Community College."

He explained that the reason he pulled me over was that my vehicle looked like something that would transport illegal aliens because it was in bad shape, old and it had been painted over. It was apparent that the border patrol agent had already entered my license plate into the computer system because he knew my last name and the city I lived in when he approached me. I told him, "I cannot afford to buy a better vehicle right now. I'm poor. That's why I'm going to college, to get out of this situation. You pulled me over because of the way my car looks? If I were able to purchase a brand new Mercedes, I would not be driving this one." I mentioned that I've been stopped in the past. And I believe it's because of the color of my skin. He said that was not his reason. As he said, "It's because of this," he pointed to the driver's side loose door panel. Furthermore, he continued to say how "junky" my car looked. Then he had the gall to ask me if could open a door (to search for illegal aliens inside). I gave him permission because I had nothing to hide, especially neither my **anger** nor **frustration**!

After he left, I stayed in my car for a couple of minutes. Tears rushed down my cheeks. All my life, a big part of me believed that discrimination against poverty and race were only in the past. I had a slight suspicion that maybe it still existed. But I fought to suppress it—until that

day. Everything had come together. Memories started coming back. The time I was stopped while jogging was not an isolated incident, after all. Moreover, a week before the border patrol agent stopped me, a police officer pulled me over on my way home from school. He said I was going too fast. Yet, he failed to mention what speed he clocked me at. I knew that was true. However, I didn't argue against him. So I handed him my driver's license and proof of insurance. After he verified my identity and driving record, he let me go. He didn't write me a speeding ticket. It was obvious that his purpose was to check whether or not I was a legal citizen.

As a child, I heard of stories of what it was like to live in this country before the civil rights movement. I read books about the experiences of those who have been treated unjustly and learned how Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had paved the way for many people. I felt lucky not to have dealt with racism firsthand. Growing up was easy. Everyone treated me fairly.

It is now 2008. I am in my thirties. And I am afraid of going to school, not because of the possibility of being robbed or shot at by gangsters, but by the chance that I may get detained by law enforcement officers. I don't know if I'll make it to school on time on a daily basis. I started leaving home a half hour earlier than usual to allow for time just in case they decide to stop me. As a college student, my main focus should be to complete my courses with high marks. However, I find it difficult to do because fear has absorbed me. Driving to and from school, once a pleasurable experience, has turned into a nightmare. I no longer pay attention to the music playing on the radio or laugh at the disc jockey's jokes. Instead, I scan my surroundings for possible law enforcement vehicles with their flashers on.

Am I "futuristic" being that traveled in history? Have I accidentally stepped into a time machine and set the scene several decades back? Am I living in a different era than the rest of the population? How many are there that share my fear? Will I wake up from this nightmare and walk back into the comfort zone that I once lived in? My heart aches...

2ND PLACE ESSAY

GROWING UP IN ST. CLAIR

Stacy Schlandraff

67

The smell of the summer rain is incomparable to that of any other season. It falls in the lulling heat, cascading down our exposed and sun-kissed skin. It moistens the warm asphalt with its pitted surface and sporadic gravel that arrives there by way of the unpaved driveways along these suburban streets. The rocks pierce our callused bare summer feet and so we rush to the damp grass to soothe them.

My mother always scolded my brother and I for not taking the time to put on our sneakers before departing through our heavy oak front door. She would shake her head when we returned just before dusk and fifteen minutes late for dinner. She knew that our dirt infested toenails and

blackened soles hung from my great grandmother's antique dining room chairs, and that they smelt of creek water. But she would laugh before bedtime as my brother and I sat on the edge of our white claw foot tub with our feet soaking in warm water and Epsom salt, adorned with blisters and bloody scratches. As she wiped them with our fake sea sponge she let out, through her nose, small sounds of "knowing better," she would have said "I told you so" but she knew that letting us both suffer from the fact that she didn't was more amusing.

Most summer days in our small sleepy Michigan town were the same as the one before and the others that remained until school in the fall.

My brother and I were close in age; my two older

siblings were leading their own lives unlike us un-cool kids. My oldest brother starting a family up north and my teenage sister that had boys and socializing on her mind rarely had time for us "little ones" as she would call us. Although we deeply envied her later curfew, her surprisingly growing and colorful vocabulary and her two digit allowance, surprisingly she never seemed to think it was enough (the feeling never changes), but at the time we thought it was the world. When she did make time for us we never missed the chance to hang out with her and her cooler and fun friends, gods in our eyes, that always seemed to have some inside joke we could never wrap our minds around.

Due to my older brother and sister's lack of interest, time and location my brother and I spent most of our summers together. Like clockwork, our carefully scripted day would begin at about 10 in the morning. This was when our mother decided that our drooling faces had to emerge from our bunk bed; then again at 10:30 and once more at 11 when we finally rolled out of our comas. We sat at the kitchen table in our t-shirts and cartoon underpants in a zombie-like state. We watched late morning cartoons over bowls of soggy cocoa puffs and fruit my mother gave us that we never ate. After Bugs Bunny cunningly defeated his current foe we raced each other up the stairs to put on yesterdays clothes, if my mother hadn't already hurried to capture them for the laundry (always finding surprises in the pockets, alive or not).

At about noon the summer sun beamed on our faces as we ran through the front yard, across Mr. Wemer's perfectly cut grass (he never got to his back door in time to yell at us), then across the dead-end dirt road behind our street to cross the creek and up onto the field which held our destination. Our destination was a massive old willow tree that stood alone in a small field with tall grass burn by the suns overwhelming illumination. It was our fort, our hideout, our friend. We planed of the hours to come under that great tree, which is now where a supermarket stands in its place, stolen, I will always believe. After that we would reach the creek again rolling up our jeans which always got wet and muddy anyways to catch frogs and investigate the dancing water. Then we would rush home to wash our hands and

grab a hand full of whatever my mother had just baked and was undoubtedly saving for dinner, and then walk downtown.

The small and rarely hopping mall we headed for always held the same patrons; mothers with their screaming infants getting milk and bread at the small family-owned grocers. Old men sitting in the gondola smoking their pipes, talking about the fish they caught in the river they stared at, as if something unforgettable would jump out of its placid flow. Their wives would spy through the windows of small boutique's pointing with their frail fingers at the summer's newest pink or baby blue jumpsuit. Lastly the kids and teens occupying seats in the ice-cream parlor, arcade and the front of the baseball card store.

My brother and I would play rock paper scissors while avoiding cracks in the pavement all the way to the drug store. There we would spend many minutes in the candy isle with glazed eyes and our hands in our pockets thumbing the giant copper chunk of penny's that we would bring out to count over and over again. As the store's keeper old Bert would keep an eye on our sticky and filthy hands we would always ultimately make the same decision of stalking up on penny candy. Walking up to the counter to pay, Bert would take our money almost reluctantly, as if it would have been more sanitary in the long run to just give us the candy.

After we had replaced our pockets' contents with sweets we would sometimes walk over to the large window of the barber shop next to a small Coney Island to watch old men of different shapes and sizes get what hair they had left snipped and their chins shaved.

After our adventure we would walk home languishing about how we should have rode our bikes, while the blue skies slowly dimmed into a dusty gray and the street lights glowed on the barren streets. Tripping up the steps of our front porch with our tired and sore legs we would enter to the smell of dinner and home.

I still live with my mother and father in that home, and so too my brother, attempting to move away after finishing college. My oldest brother and his wife visits as often as he's able with his two teenage girls, along with my sister and her husband and two upcoming teens, a toddler, and twins awaiting their grand entrance from my

sister's growing belly. We all make time to sit in my great grandmother's antique chairs to eat and visit.

I think upon those summer days when I look into my nieces' and nephews' eyes, trailing behind them in our big backyard in my bare feet. My mother shakes her head, and reminds me of the location in our pantry where I can find the Epsom salt, which hasn't changed these many years.

SELECTION OF MERIT ESSAY

PA'S HOUSE

Krysta Marek

70

The walls were the color of a robin's egg, that light baby blue that left you soaring in the sky. The dark trim was a deep contrast, very wide and very bold. Trains and butterflies filled the walls in forms of clocks, knick-knacks, and various other décor. There was one clock in particular that instead of chiming on the hour would burst into a train whistle. It was very loud and often startled me as I sat on the old plaid couch for hours listening. Stuffed toys filled the back of the couch like an army of treasures taken from those who found no value in them. They stared lifelessly across the room towards him, their savior of sorts. There was a blanket spread across the back of the couch, under the army of toys, made by the one he had loved.

The tiny coffee table that sat in front of the couch held all sorts of interesting items: coasters, a coin bank, a

doily, a broken watch and two cans of cashews. The most intriguing of them was the second can of cashews that was not meant for eating, but obviously to keep the squirrels entertained. The squirrels would climb up the screen of the door, peering in, searching for their salty treat. They guarded the front porch, stalking out anyone who came too close. Manhandling your pant leg, they were unafraid to venture up your side, clinging to the fabric with their tiny sharp nails. Bottle brush tails flicking back and forth, almost like a nervous tick, kept me at bay, glad they had been outside while I was in. He had always had a way with animals: cats, birds, fish, lizards, and squirrels. His gentle hands had raised many, while his keen eyes watched others fade away. There was no loss of sadness in the old man, but always a sense of worth.

An old television sat in the front room, used more as a piece of furniture. The dark wood encased the "boob tube" so that only the screen and buttons showed. It was large and cumbersome with wheels so that you could roll it across the shag carpet floor. The only source of technology that seemed somewhat current sat on top of it: the DVD player and the alarm clock that would automatically set itself when plugged into the wall. He never cared much for the DVD "contraption," but the clock he found very useful. As it became more difficult for him to walk about the house, he had trouble fixing the clocks to the right time. There were many of them, and for his feeble legs it was a chore that could last all day. After the discovery of this amazing clock, he left all the others to chime on their own time.

His old La-z-boy chair was large and comfortable. A blanket was set on the back of it for those afternoon naps that turned into evening slumbers. His long skinny body seemed to become engulfed in the chair as he sank into it, old weary bones would collapse under the stress of holding himself up. Loose skin fell away from his body; he would often pull on it in a joking manner. "I'm just skin and bones, skin and bones," he would chuckle, slowly shaking his head. We would all smile at his remark, sensing the underlying sadness in his voice. His hands were rough, and his fingers were long; decades of hard work on the rail road shown in the calluses as he gripped his wooden cane, often knocking it against the floor filling the room with a hollow sound.

The back of the house was occupied by the small kitchen, hot pink and tiled white. The refrigerator held promises of candy and pop. But to get to the good pop you would have to venture down the stairs and out to the backroom that served as a boot room for everything but boots: old glass Coca-Cola bottles, neon signs, and pots that once held plants eclectically filled the space. You would have to watch where you stepped, not wanting to knock anything over and cause a mess in the chaotic organization. Wooden crates collected on the floor overflowing with jars of all shapes and sizes. Everything seemed ancient and untouchable.

The house was a time capsule, preserving not only material items, but the life that was once lived. The walls

were host to memories, as was the floor who had been trampled with the feet of many he had loved. Once a man with a family and hard working job was now dwindled down to the old lonely man resting in his chair. His body was running thin, but his mind was still sharp, keen on the past and present. He knew well who I was, and considered me someone he deeply cared for. Even as it seemed everything was coming to an end, he never once lost that sly humor, chuckling at his own expense. Looking into the floor with his dark eyes he would mutter, "This isn't livin'. This isn't livin'... this is just exsitin'." Our trips to visit were long, although they became few as years past. His heart and home always welcomed us and gladly we stepped inside what he had worked hard to gain, never truly understanding the old house was a reflection of his own life.

SELECTION OF MERIT ESSAY

CINDERELLA: THE STEPMOTHER'S STORY

Kristie Lynch

72

Most everyone knows the story of Cinderella, especially girls. After watching Cinderella, girls of all ages dream of the day "their prince will come," the predominant theme of the story. However, my story is the one that happened in-between; the conflict of good vs. evil, where stepmothers and stepsisters are painted in a evil light. I'm here to dispel the myth that all stepmothers are mean, demanding, fire-breathing dragons of fairy-tale lore, and that all stepsisters are ugly, lazy, jealous creatures, just as all the Cinderellas in this world are not always innocent damsels in distress. Accordingly, not all Cinderella's are tall, blonde, blue-eyed, shapely, fair-skinned, or soft-spoken. My Cinderella is a beauty too; however, she is the shorter, raven-haired, dark-eyed, stockier, suntanned, never wrong,

much louder version.

At the beginning of the movie, you see Cinderella in rags on the floor with a scrub brush and bucket washing the floor, while her step-family taunts her. You feel sorry for the beautiful little princess and are sympathetic. However—that was the story she told. The truth was the stepmother had just asked, plaintively, "Cinderella, could you please pick up the french fries you dropped on the floor?" in utter despondency and with a look that said *you got to be kidding me*, she bent over and picked them up, barely wiping the floor with her napkin, leaving a faint splat of ketchup still on the floor where they fell. And as witnessed, the story changed to "She had me on my hands and knees with a scrub brush washing the whole floor." And let's not forget

the raggedy wardrobe. The "They made me dress in rags," in reality was, "No, we're not spending \$169.00 on a dress unless you ARE invited to a ball."

To take you back a bit, when I became a stepmother I wanted to break the facade that we were evil. I bent over backward, at first, spending a lot of my time and money to accommodate my newly acquired daughter. My own daughter, i.e. the new stepsister, and I were excited to add to our two-person family. We tried to make her visits fun and welcome her with open arms trying to make her feel comfortable and a part of our family. My daughter was excited to think she wouldn't be an only child anymore. Alas, that was to be her destiny, as Cinderella relished the fact that she was an only child and wouldn't permit it. With there being another princess, she couldn't have ALL the attention for herself, and she was jealous. Her envy burgeoned from a light sea-foam green to a deep, dark forest-green found only in the deepest, darkest jungles of far-away kingdoms.

Her jealousy was so nefarious, she banned my daughter and I from her presence whenever she came to visit the king. She made the official proclamation throughout the kingdom, "the evil stepmother and nasty stepsister were not to be in attendance when she was at the castle to visit the king or she would never step foot in the castle again!" Unfortunately, the distressed king bowed to her wishes, afraid of losing Cinderella, and did away with us, brandishing us to the tower whenever the princess was afoot.

But I'm getting ahead of the story. We really tried to make Cinderella a part of the family. Yet, I now realize, even when you think you are doing something to make a princess happy, you can be way off. For instance, when we were able to, we gave her, her own bedroom. I figured that if she had her own room she would feel more at home. I put a lot of thought into that room making it fit for the pretty little princess. The room was decorated in pinks and burgundies with bright, lively ballerinas scattered about. I decorated it with her pictures and even personalized her royal door. However, according to her tales, it was a gloomy, grey dungeon that she was subjected to; where she was imprisoned on her evenings over. This actuality meant she wasn't happy she couldn't stay up all night watching TV on

the couch anymore, and the meanest thing of all... she had a bedtime.

As Cinderella got older and traveled to different kingdoms looking for a suitor, the king was finally able to gain control of his castle and took me for his queen. The three of us lived happily in the castle until Cinderella heard of our unity and she hastened back to the castle to once again banish my daughter and I to the tower, so she could rule again. This time I was ready. I was now the queen and "needn't put up with such folly." I said, "I am the queen and I live in this castle, and my daughter and I will no longer hide, if you won't come to visit the king because of this, so be it." This sent Cinderella in a rage never witnessed before. Stamping her feet and yelling for all to hear the spoiled little princess declared, "If I can't be the queen of the castle and if my stepmother and stepsister aren't sent back up into the tower, I will punish the king by denouncing him as my father."

So Cinderella left the castle; returning only sporadically, to wreak havoc on our peaceful kingdom, when SHE deemed it. Being angry and defiant, she set about throughout the surrounding lands, for years, weaving her tales of woe. "I AM abused and mistreated by my stepmother! I AM ignored by my father! and I WAS banished from the castle! Woe is me!" Cinderella, having such beauty is able to cast a magical spell on all she meets. When she weaves her mystical tales (that most commoners can easily recognize as falsities) her peasants become spellbound and believers, most notably, her Prince Charming. Mr. Charming has lashed out evil spells with his tongue and struck us down with his fiery sword many times doing her bidding. She has started an uprising against the castle that has been never-ending and relentless. One illustration, to retailiate against her father and to continue her snobbery of me, her harshest admonishment to date, was to disallow the king and I attendance to her graduation ceremonies from princess school. She held her cotillion on the eve of the master ceremony to hide it from her father and I. She did not invite the king or his closest royal decendents. Yet, to further add to the treachery and treason of the king, she did invite the king's more prominent, distent kinsfolk to publically embarrass the poor king.

One must always remember some things are not always what they seem. In the movie, the stepmother is depicted as cold and impertinent. When talking to Cinderella, the stepmother's voice is monotone, somber, and controlled, and her facial features seem severe, grim, and emotionless. What everyone through the years, even I, had deduced as being "mean" to Cinderella, was wrong! I know and understand now. I have begrudgingly inherited the Cinderella "stepmother voice". At times, I get so frustrated toward the precious little princess when talking to her that my voice sounds controlled because either I'm trying not to yell out of anger, or worse yet, emotionless, because I'm trying not to cry from the emotional hurt that she has inflicted on me by her repeated rejections. Being only a stepmother, I'm not allowed to say anything to the princess, because I'm not of "the royal blood"....something the princess reminds me of constantly.

What should have been a happy blending of families has turned out to be years of frustration for all. Cinderella can't, and refuses to try and see the advantages of having an extended family; more people to love, console, and be there for her. She couldn't get past the indignation that she had to follow rules, not every want was followed by a "yes", and she had gained an "imagined competition" from a stepsister and wife her father adores also. What else could the princess do but turn me into the wretched stepmother to become the center of attention again? I can only hope with time and maturity, Cinderella will realize her foolishness and folly has only done her a disservice and she'll return to the castle without hostility so that we all can experience, "and they lived happily ever after..." the way the story is supposed to go.

SELECTION OF MERIT ESSAY

THE GIFT

Kristie Lynch

The gift I received years ago is not a fitting object for the hot, humid, days of summer, but I do leave it out all year round. My long ago present has special significance to me for two very important reasons. Firstly, it is the only thing I still have that was given to me by my now deceased grandmother—and secondly, my mother had just recently rescued it from the bowels of her attic and she took special care in refurbishing it; getting it ready to give back to me, knowing how much it would mean to me. I felt proud that she finally felt I was ready to take over ownership of such a precious gift. My gift doesn't look special and no one seeing it draped over the back of my couch, would give a second thought to it's origin, but to me it is very special.

The gift was given to me on my 7th Christmas by my

grandmother, along with assorted toys and clothes. I remember how excited I was about the Barbie airplane I received that Christmas. It came with all the accessories—a little push cart and dishes for the passengers meals, and uniforms for Ken and Barbie's new occupations as airplane pilot and stewardess. It also came with one of those silver winged pins, that the airlines gave out to the kids to wear at the time, for me to wear and show off at school.

I also remember from that Christmas the gift that was ignored because I couldn't play with it or wear it to school. While I still don't remember what happened to the airplane and other toys I received from that Christmas—they were probably broken and thrown away—I have finally recovered the gift, at seven, I ignored. It is not unique or even pretty, in

fact it is rather plain-looking—but it holds the key to unlock the memories that ended, two years later, when I was nine.

My grandmother has long passed, but thanks to my mother's insight and forethought many memories such as my 7th Christmas, have come alive again by the return of my grandmother's gift. My special gift was just a simple blanket. Not the unique homemade quilt, one might have expected—her arthritis took that skill away long ago. Nor was it down-filled, lacy, fancy, or expensive. My grandmother coming from the depression era, saw the practicality and longevity of the blue and red checked wool blanket that was one of my gifts that year.

It definitely was plain and simple to the unknowing, but to me it symbolizes the warmth, love, and memory of a kindly old woman. My beloved blanket is a remembrance of the plump old woman who used to feed me her homemade goodies; piping hot fresh out of the oven. My memories still have me smelling cinnamon wafting through the air. It's a reminder of the soft, cuddly lap that used to be my seat while I was read "The Gingerbread Man," "Cinderella," and my favorite, "Mother Goose". I loved the way the rhyming words sounded and the silliness of cows jumping over the moon, kids living in a shoe, and I always said if I could just have a dog, I would always save my bones for him so he would never go hungry. However, Grandma always countered with "We'll talk about a dog when you get older." It's a vision of the smiling, blue, glass-covered eyes, crinkly skin, and very white straight smile—(Guess what! My granny was the only person that I knew that could take her teeth out and put them back in. She showed me, but I had to promise not to tell anyone else. It was our secret!) that was my grandmother. Plain, simple, ordinary, synonyms for the majority of peoples lives—lives that are made special by the gift of love from others. As I wrap myself in my grandmother's warmth on chilly winter days I reflect and think, "My blanket, a gift from my grandmother, than my mother, is what life is all about. Wouldn't you agree?"

ELEANOR MATHEWS AWARD

Joshua Riehl

Unlike the other three major awards (Colwell, Redman, and Nickerson) which are given to outstanding works in each literary genre for that issue, the Mathews Award recognizes overall achievement in creative writing. Traditionally, students who have been published in multiple editions of *Patterns* or who have had works in multiple genres appear in the same issue have received the award.

This year we enjoy an embarrassment of riches in this regard. First, we have six (!) students—Joshua Riehl, Stacy Schlaudraff, Violet Gilbert, Drew Gorzen and Ted Parkhurst—who have their work appearing for the second time in *Patterns*. We also have Luke Dimick, Stacy Schlaudraff, Kristie Lynch and Drew Gorzen all with works from more than one genre included in the 51st edition.

Although all of these students deserve special recognition, the editors have selected Joshua Riehl to be this year's recipient of the Eleanor Mathews Award. Eleanor Mathews wished the award to go to the student "that exhibits outstanding creativity," to use her words. In the year 2009 Josh's work on creative writing in general, but most specifically on the screenplay and the eventual filming of his treatment of Hemingway's story "*The Killers*" makes him stand out even in the company of this year's set of fine student writers.

SELECTION OF MERIT SCREENPLAY

THE KILLERS

Joshua Riehl

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INT. KILLER'S CAR

Black screen.

The sound of a radio dial being turned, station to station and the hum of the engine can be heard.

FADE IN:

INT. KILLER'S CAR

Close-up of MAX's hand, turning dial. He gives up and turns it off.

Close-up of AL's hand, shifting gears, the hum of the engine grows louder.

Medium shot of Al and Max from the back of the car. Al is driving. Max pulls out a cigarette and lights it, taking a long drag.

AL

The window, Max; roll down the window.

Max rolls down the window and ashes his cigarette.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY

We see the Killer's Car, a royal blue Volvo, speed down highway I94.

We see the Killer's Car take EXIT TO PORT HURON

CUT TO:

INT. KILLER'S CAR

We Max and Al from behind them, looking out the windshield.

Max flicks the cigarette out the window.

They sit in silence for a few beats.

A butterfly flies into the windshield, splattering a yellow smear in a quarter-sized circle.

MAX

That'll teach him.

AL

Teach him what?

MAX

Teach him to watch where he's going.

AL

He was going to Mexico, Max.

MAX

That sounds like a nice little vacation right about now. What's a butterfly going to go to Mexico for?

AL

(Annoyed)

Spring break Max. Spring break.

A beat of uncomfortable silence.

AL

Every year butterflies migrate South. A 3000 mile trip and it ends on a highway in Michigan.

MAX

Poor bastard didn't even make it to Toledo. He should've just stayed in Michigan and dealt with the cold like the rest of us.

AL

It's not like he had a choice.

MAX

Why the hell do you know so much about butterflies?

AL

I watched a show on TV. Butterflies migrate South in the winter and North in the summer, just so that they can get there, lay eggs and die.

MAX

Why the hell don't they just lay their eggs in Mexico and stay there? It's nice in Mexico.

AL

There's no choice in it. It's all instinct, even their migratory patterns are predetermined.

MAX

What?

AL

That butterfly could have been flying for weeks, just to smash into our window. Think about that Max, doesn't that

make you appreciate nature?

MAX

Butterflies are stupid.

Max rolls her eyes and turns the car off of the highway. They drive for a little while.

Max starts laughing.

AL

What's so funny?

MAX

It's a Volvo! Get it? A Volvo!

They both start laughing.

CUT TO:

EXT. IRIS' FLOWER SHOP

Al takes a right turn and we see Iris' Flower Shop after the Volvo leaves the frame.

CUT TO:

INT. IRIS' FLOWER SHOP

NICK ADAMS, a young man in a white shirt, blue hat and goatee, works diligently on a flower bouquet. The FLOWER SHOP OWNER sits at the counter going over bills.

FLOWER SHOP OWNER

Almost done Nick?

NICK ADAMS

Yup, just finishing this one up.

FLOWER SHOP OWNER

That looks real nice.

NICK ADAMS

Thanks.

FLOWER SHOP OWNER

You going to be taking them with you?

NICK ADAMS

Yup, this one too, since they're both around the corner.

FLOWER SHOP OWNER

Well have a nice weekend.

NICK ADAMS

Thanks, you too.

CUT TO:

EXT. IRIS FLOWER SHOP

We see NICK ADAMS, a young man, walk along a street in brisk fall weather, trees changing color all around him.. He's

holding 2 flower bouquets as he walks through Pine Grove Park and then to downtown.

Nick stops and begins to knock on the door of a building.

After a few seconds a woman answers the door.

We see Nick give her the flowers and say goodbye.

Nick continues walking down the street as brown and gold leaves fall from a strong breeze.

He then stops at another building, enters and delivers the second bouquet to a receptionist.

Nick exits the building, checks his watch.

We see Nick cross the street and enter Henry's Lunchroom.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S LUNCHROOM

Henry's Lunchroom, a former saloon converted into a diner, is vacant except for GEORGE. George, a thin, middle-aged man with a full grey beard and glasses stands behind the counter. He smiles at Nick.

Nick sits down in front of him, and George places a cup of coffee in front of him and a piece of pie. The usual.

We see Nick stir his coffee with a spoon and then use the same spoon to dig right into the pie hungrily.

George is drying glasses, preparing for the evening rush.

We hear the sound of jingle bells as the front door opened.

ENTER MAX and AL.

The two men, MAX and AL, are dressed nearly identical.

Black jackets with collars, and dark brimmed hats. Both wore black gloves.

Max and Al walk directly up to the diner counter without as much as a glance at Nick Adams.

GEORGE

What can I get you gentlemen?

MAX

I don't know. What sounds good Al?

AL

I don't know. Just don't know what I want to eat.

The men look over their menus while George and Nick watch on, suspiciously.

MAX

Give me, pork tenderloin with apple sauce and a side of mashed potatoes.

GEORGE

Sorry, it isn't ready yet.

MAX

Why the hell is it on the menu then?

GEORGE

That's on the dinner menu. We don't serve dinner until six o'clock.

George turns to look at the clock on the wall behind him that reads 5:15.

GEORGE

It's five o'clock.

AL

Clock says twenty minutes past five.

GEORGE

It's twenty-minutes fast.

MAX

Damn the clock, what can we get to eat?

GEORGE

I can make you sandwiches. I've got ham and eggs, liver and bacon, and sliced steak.

AL

I'll have the baked salmon with cream sauce, green peas, and mashed potatoes.

GEORGE

That's the dinner too.

AL

Everything we want is dinner eh? That's the way you work it here.

GEORGE

At 6 o'clock we serve dinner. For now I can get sandwiches-

AL

I'll have ham and eggs.

MAX

Give me liver and bacon.

GEORGE

Sam, can I get a ham and eggs and liver and bacon?

George walks further down the bar.

MAX

(to NICK ADAMS)

This sure is a hot town. What do they call it?

NICK ADAMS
Port Huron.
AL
(to Max)
Ever hear of it?
MAX
Port Urine? Nope.
AL
(to Nick Adams)
What do they do here at night?
At this point Samuel comes out and hands George two sandwiches. George then returns to the counter where Max and Al are sitting.
MAX
They eat the dinner. They all come here and eat the big dinner.
GEORGE
That's right.
AL
Oh, so you think that's right do you?
GEORGE
Sure.
AL
You're a pretty bright boy, aren't ya?
GEORGE
I guess.
MAX
Well you're not! Is he Al?
AL
Nopel! He's dull!
(to Nick Adams)
What's your name?
NICK ADAMS
Adams.
AL
Another real bright boy! Ain't he just a bright boy Max?
MAX
This town's full of em.
George places the sandwiches down in front of the men.
GEORGE
Which is yours?

AL
Don't you remember?
GEORGE
Liver and bacon.
George switches the places of the sandwiches and places two glasses of water in front of the men.
MAX
Just a real bright boy. You got anything to drink bright boy?
GEORGE
Pop, ginger-ale, juice.
MAX
I asked if you had anything to drink.
GEORGE
Just those.
The two men unwrap their sandwiches and begin eating, with gloves on. George stands at the counter watching them eat.
MAX
What are you looking at?
GEORGE
Nothing.
MAX
Nothing? You were looking at me! The hell you were looking at nothing!
AL
Maybe bright boy just meant it as a joke Max.
George forces a laugh.
MAX
You don't have to laugh. You don't get it, do you?
GEORGE
All right. Sorry.
MAX
He thinks it's all right! You hear that? He says it's all right.
That's a good one huh Al?
AL
He's a thinker, he is.
The eat their sandwiches. We see George go over and top off Nick Adam's coffee cup.
AL
Hey what's bright boy's name there?

MAX
(to Nick)
Hey bright boy, go stand on the other side of the counter with your boy friend.
NICK ADAMS
Hey what's the idea guys?
MAX
There isn't any idea.
AL
You better listen to him bright boy.
Nick nervously steps around the counter
GEORGE
Hey, what's the big idea?
AL
None of your god damn business. Who's in the kitchen?
GEORGE
The Mexican.
AL
What do you mean the Mexican?
GEORGE
The Mexican that cooks.
AL
Tell him to come in.
GEORGE
C'mon, what's the idea here?
AL
I told you to tell him to come in.
GEORGE
Who do you think you are?
MAX
We know damn well who we are. Do we look stupid?
AL
You talk stupid. Why the hell you arguing with this guy?
(to George)
Listen, tell that Mexican to come out here. Now.
GEORGE
What are you going to do to him?
AL
Nothing! What would we do to a Mexican? Use your head bright boy!
George goes over to the door to the kitchen.

GEORGE
Samuel, can you come out here for a minute.
SAMUEL, the cook, comes out from the kitchen area.
SAMUEL
What's up?
AL
All right, Mexican, you stand right there.
SAMUEL
Whatever.
Al removes a gun from his coat pocket and waves it at Nick Adams to come back around the counter and has him stand next to Samuel.
AL
All right, I'm going back to the kitchen with the Mexican and the bright boy.
Al takes the two men into the back.
Max sits silently, finishing his sandwich.
The music from the radio stops and the RADIO DJ speaks.
RADIO DJ
You're listening to WJLG, the Blue Water Area's only source for the sweet sounds of the 20's and 30's. It's currently five-fifteen and time for traffic and weather together. It's currently 68 degrees outside so get out there and enjoy it because by Sunday, temperatures will be dropping to the low 40s. There's an accident at the 69/94 interchange, so I'd advise taking another route. We've got another block of the sweet sounds of the 20's and 30's coming up, starting with Louis Armstrong and Go Down Moses.
George nervously watches him.
Max finishes his sandwich and speaks.
MAX
Well bright boy, why don't you make conversation?
GEORGE
What's this all about?
MAX
Hey Al! Bright boy wants to know what it's all about.
AL (O.C.)
Why don't you tell him?
MAX
What do you think it's all about?

GEORGE
I don't know.
MAX
Well what do you think?
GEORGE
I wouldn't say.
MAX
Hey Al! Bright boy says he wouldn't say what he thinks it's all about.
AL (O.C.)
I can hear you all right.
Al props open the door enough so that he can see out. He's still off camera.
AL (O.C.)
Bright boy! Stand a little further along the bar. You move a little to the left, Max.
MAX
Talk to me, bright boy. What do you think's going to happen?
George stands there in silence.
MAX
I'll tell you what's going to happen. We're going to kill a Swede. A big ol Swede named Ole Anderson. You know him?
GEORGE
Yes.
MAX
He comes in here every night, don't he?
GEORGE
Sometimes he comes here.
MAX
He comes here at six o'clock, don't he?
GEORGE
If he comes.
MAX
We know all that, bright boy. Talk about something else. Ever go to the movies?
GEORGE
Once in a while.
MAX
You ought to go to the movies more often. The movies are a fine thing for a bright boy like you.

GEORGE
What are you going to kill Ole Anderson for? What'd he ever do to you?
MAX
He never had a chance to do anything to us. He never even seen us.
AL (O.C.)
And he's only going to see us once.
GEORGE
What are you going to kill him for then?
MAX
We're killing him for a friend. Just a favor for a friend bright boy.
AL (O.C.)
Shut up! You talk too goddamn much.
MAX
Well, I got to keep bright boy amused. Don't I, bright boy?
Al walks in.
AL
You talk too damn much. The Mexican and my bright boy are amused by themselves. I got them tied up like a couple of girlfriends in the convent.
MAX
I suppose you were in a convent.
AL
You never know.
MAX
You were in a kosher convent. That's where you were.
AL
(to George)
If anybody comes in you tell them the cook is off, and if they keep after it, you tell them you'll go back and cook yourself. You got that bright boy?
GEORGE
All right. What are you going to do with us afterward?
MAX
That'll depend. That's one of those things you never know at the time.
Al goes back to the kitchen.
Max whistles to himself while George stands quietly.

When the clock reads quarter past six, the jingle bells on the door ring.

ENTER JOE SMITH

JOE SMITH

Hey George, can I get supper yet?

GEORGE

Cooks gone out Joe. He'll be back in about half an hour.

Joe Smith looks at his watch.

JOE SMITH

I'd better go up the street.

EXIT Joe Smith.

MAX

That was real nice bright boy. You're a regular little gentleman.

AL (O.C.)

He knew I'd blow his head off.

MAX

No that ain't it. Bright boy is nice. He's a nice boy. A nice bright boy. I like him.

We see George smile nervously and begin to wipe the counter down.

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We hear the jingle bells on the door.

ENTER CHURCH MOM

CHURCH MOM

Evening George, can I get two chicken dinners to go?

GEORGE

Cook's gone out, should be back in a half hour.

CHURCH MOM

You have anything ready right now? The kids have church group tonight and we're running late.

GEORGE

I can fix you up a couple of sandwiches. Ham and cheese

CHURCH MOM

That would be great.

George writes up a check and heads back to the kitchen.

We see Al standing behind the door with his gun pointed at George.

As George enters the kitchen we see Samuel and Nick Adams bound together with dish rags and towels.

We see George proceed to the kitchen counter where he begins to assemble the sandwiches. As he uses the butchers

knife to slice the ham, he pauses for just a second.

AL (O.C.)

Use your head bright boy.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S LUNCHROOM

Church mom sits at the counter next to Max.

CHURCH MOM

Boy, we're really running late for church.

(beat)

You go to church?

Max blows smoke in her face.

George re-enters from the kitchen with two sandwiches wrapped in wax paper. He puts them in a bag and hands them to the woman who promptly pays him before leaving.

CHURCH MOM

Oh George, thanks, I'm late.

EXIT Church Mom.

MAX

Bright boy can do everything. He can cook and everything.

You'd make some girl a nice wife, bright boy.

Thirty seconds of nervous silence.

After a few seconds, the jingle bells ring.

ENTER ANGRY MAN.

Angry Man walks up to the counter and is about to sit down when George speaks.

GEORGE

We're not serving dinner, cook's sick.

ANGRY MAN

Why the hell don't you get another cook? Aren't you running a diner?

Angry man storms out.

EXIT Angry Man.

After a few seconds of silence, Max speaks:

MAX

Come on Al.

Al enters from the kitchen.

AL

What about the bright boys and the Mexican?

MAX

They're all right.

AL
You think so?
MAX
Sure. We're through with it.
AL
I don't like it. It's sloppy. You talk to much.
MAX
What the hell, we got to keep amused don't we?
AL
You talk too much, all the same.
Al and Max start to exit and stop.
AL
So long bright boy. You're a lucky boy.
MAX
That's the truth. You ought to play the lotto bright boy.
Al and Max exit.
We see George look out the window before running back to the kitchen.
CUT TO:
INT. KITCHEN
We see George untie Nick and Samuel, who then stand up.
SAMUEL
I don't want anymore of that. I don't want anymore of that.
NICK ADAMS
What the hell was that about?
GEORGE
They were going to kill Ole Anderson. They were going to shoot him when he came in to eat.
NICK ADAMS
Ole Anderson?
GEORGE
Sure.
SAMUEL
They all gone?
GEORGE
Yeah. They're gone now.
SAMUEL
I don't like it. I don't like any of it at all.
NICK ADAMS
Someone better go warn Ole Anderson.

SAMUEL
You better not have anything to do with it at all. You better stay way out of it.
GEORGE
Don't go if you don't want to.
SAMUEL
Mixing up in this ain't going to get you anywhere. Stay out of it.
NICK ADAMS
I'm gonna. Where's he live?
SAMUEL
Little boys always know what they want to do.
GEORGE
He lives up at Hirsch Apartments
NICK ADAMS
I'll be back.
EXIT Nick Adams.
CUT TO:
EXT. DOWNTOWN
Nick leaves the diner and we see him RUN, in one continuous shot, over a bridge, turn left, down towards the river, along the boardwalk, until he goes underneath a train tunnel.
CUT TO:
EXT. HIRSCH APARTMENTS
We see Nick run up from the side of the street up to a giant apartment complex. He runs to the doors and enters.
CUT TO:
INT. HIRSCH APARTMENTS
We see Nick wait for the elevator. After a moment he gives up and takes the stairs until he arrives at the 4th floor.
We see Nick knock on the door No answer. He knocks again.
OLE ANDERSON (O.S.)
Who is it?
NICK ADAMS
It's Nick Adams.
OLE ANDERSON (O.S.)
Come in.
CUT TO:
INT. OLE ANDERSON'S APARTMENT

We see Nick walk into the tiny apartment where OLE ANDERSON lays on a pull out bed/futon, with his back to Nick. Without turning to look at him, Ole Anderson speaks.

OLE ANDERSON

What was it?

NICK ADAMS

I was up at Henry's and two fellows came in and tied me and the cook up and they said they were going to kill you.

(beat)

They put us out in the kitchen, they were going to shoot you when you came in to supper.

Ole Anderson lays there silently.

NICK ADAMS (CONT'D)

I thought I better come and tell you about it.

OLE ANDERSON

There isn't anything I can do about it.

NICK ADAMS

I can tell you what they were like.

OLE ANDERSON

8 I don't want to know what they were like. Thanks for coming to tell me about it.

NICK ADAMS

That's all right.

Nick starts to leave and stops.

NICK ADAMS (CONT'D)

Don't you want me to go and see the police?

OLE ANDERSON

No, that wouldn't do any good.

NICK ADAMS

Isn't there something I could do?

OLE ANDERSON

No. There ain't anything to do.

NICK ADAMS

Maybe it was just a bluff.

OLE ANDERSON

No it ain't just a bluff.

Nick starts to leave again.

We see Ole Anderson roll on his back, staring at the ceiling.

OLE ANDERSON

The only thing is, I just can't make up my mind to go out. I been in here all day.

NICK ADAMS

Couldn't you get out of town?

OLE ANDERSON

No, I'm through with all that running around.

With this we see Ole roll back towards the wall.

OLE ANDERSON (CONT'D)

There ain't anything to do now.

NICK ADAMS

Couldn't you fix it up some way?

OLE ANDERSON

No. I got in wrong. There ain't anything to do. After a while I'll make up my mind to go out.

NICK ADAMS

I better go back to Henry's.

OLE ANDERSON

So long. Thanks for coming around.

Nick starts to leave.

OLE ANDERSON (CONT'D)

Adams, kill the lights.

EXIT Nick Adams.

CUT TO:

INT. HIRSCH APARTMENTS LOBBY

LONG SHOT - STEADY

We see Max and Al come into the lobby, read the tenant list.

They go to the elevator, but after a few seconds lose patience and take the stairs.

We see the elevator finally arrive once Max and Al have left screen.

The elevator door opens and Nick Adams exits, walks through the lobby and run back to Henry's.

CUT TO:

INT. HENRY'S LUNCHROOM

We see George sitting at the counter eating a sandwich.

Nick walks up and sits next to George.

GEORGE

Did you see Ole?

NICK ADAMS

Yeah. He's in his room and won't go out.

GEORGE
Did you tell him about it?
NICK ADAMS
Yeah I told him but he knows what it's about.
GEORGE
What's he going to do?
NICK ADAMS
Nothing.
GEORGE
They'll kill him.
NICK ADAMS
I guess they will.
GEORGE
He must have got mixed up in something in Chicago.
NICK ADAMS
I guess so.
GEORGE
It's a hell of a thing.

NICK ADAMS
It's an awful thing.
George gets up from his seat on the counter, walks to the other side, puts his plate away and begins to wipe the counter down.
After a brief (10 seconds) silence.
NICK ADAMS
I wonder what he did?
GEORGE
Double crossed somebody. That's what they kill 'em for.
NICK ADAMS
I'm gonna get out of this town.
GEORGE
Yes. That's a good thing to do.
NICK ADAMS
I can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it. It's too damned awful.
GEORGE
Well, you better not think about it.
We see Nick smoke quickly smoke a cigarette.
The camera PANS up, following the smoke from the cigarette as it drifts towards the ceiling fan.

CUT TO:
INT. OLE ANDERSON'S APARTMENT
We see Ole Anderson, in CLOSE UP, laying on his bed, smoking a cigarette. The shadows from the fan in his window fall on his face.
We see Ole Anderson snuff out the cigarette in an ashtray already full of butts.
We see Ole Anderson roll over and get out of bed.
CUT TO:
INT. OLE ANDERSON'S BATHROOM
We see Ole Anderson turn on the light and look in the mirror. Ole Anderson sighs, turns the faucet on and begins to shave. As he begins to shave the last strip of shaving cream on his face, Ole Anderson stops for a fraction of a second and finishes shaving, nicking his chin, where a small drop of blood appears before rolling down his neck. He then rinses his face off with water, dries it with a hand towel, and turns the light off.

B LANCHE REDMAN AWARD POETRY

INVITATIONS

“Invitations” is a moving, memorable piece. It speaks eerily, in concrete terms, of both a place and a state from which we would like to look and steer away. But it is the poet’s job to take us there anyway, and this poet’s gaze lingers on the cemetery, and invites us to do so as well. I took a strange kind of comfort in knowing that this speaker and I were together in the truck, still alive, and still driving by. But I also learned something about poetry from this poem—the way simple language can resonate in the same way that “brief glances” linger.

—Laura Kasischke

I must force myself to face the road
when I pass Hillside Cemetery.

Names on tombstones—Ingles, Westrick,
Schweihofer—are people I know.

In some tombs, ancestors from previous centuries,
their names, legacies weathering away;
other tombs, precocious,
waiting, with one year and one dash,
for their ground to be filled
and second year added.

More entrancing—my truck’s headlights
illuminate the tombstones as we glide by—
and I see a truck like mine,
perhaps with a driver like me
traveling down his road,
reflecting on the living
as he shines through the walls
of his soft, lofty mausoleum.

INVITATIONS

(CONT'D)

But brief glances only;
a car, a deer, a sudden turn,
could grace the road.
I cannot yet accept
these small, friendly invitations
to enter this lively ballroom
through the earthy doors to my right.

Andrew Gorney

1ST PLACE POETRY

A CHICAGO

“A Chicago’s” music is bloody, and beautiful, and this poet, with such stark imagery and staccato lines truly makes new something we’ve read about before. In six intense lines, we are given a novel’s worth of atmosphere, transported in time and space, and even left with an unanswered question. This is memorable, vivid work, and it does more than disturb us: it shows us the beauty that can be made with language out of terror. Our eyes have been opened by this poem.

—Laura Kasischke

Cleaned up the pig's blood.

Just beneath the shiny new rug of

Bent glass, bright aluminum, and consuming neon

The stain curdles.

Coagulating, drying, hardening, covering

Mills of steel and thousands of feet in ships.

Theodore Parkhurst

2ND PLACE POETRY

PENDULUM

“Pendulum” is an interesting reversal of the more expected ‘Ars Poetic,’ and speaks to an experience I’ve not read about before: how it feels to enter the world of another’s poem, to trespass there, but to do so out of gratitude and compassion. This poet has a sense of how to progress through a series of considerations, and to surprise the reader in the end. With each stanza, I thought I knew where I was being taken, and then realized, at the end, that I’d been on a very different journey from the one I’d thought I was on. This is a real accomplishment.

—Laura Kasischke

That Professor’s pen is poison

My student whispered as he exited class

Bound by a code of conduct

I cannot expound my defense and say

Your pen is a prospector

Methodically mining for metaphor and rhyme

My pen is a smelter

Separating pure poetry from drossy prose

Your pen is a warlock

Ensorceling text with comma chaos

My pen is a priest

Petitioning for sinner’s punctual pardon

Your pen is a sailor

Lamenting lost lines in storm-tossed seas

My pen is a captain

Navigating each passage with compass and map

PENDULUM

(CONT'D)

Your pen is an apprentice

Scorning the canon of story and verse

My pen is a master

A vital literary legacy unleashed

My pen is not poison

Carelessly dripping down your page

My pen is an antidote I whisper

As I administer the cure to his first draft

Violet Gilbert

SELECTION OF MERIT POETRY

LIBERATING BELL

That bell will liberate me,
Set me free for the summer.
Fourth grade will be forgotten
And that sweet tone will erase
Nine months of learning
And this prison cell-like room forever.

Just five more minutes.
I could care less what the teacher's saying.
She's exhausted from adroit antics
And longs for summer solitude.
Fidgeting like a flea covered ferret,
I'm a time bomb ready to explode.

Four minutes left. Time stands still.
I hug my backpack, feeling ill.
Everyone's facing the blackboard
Dressed in shorts and tees,
Dreaming of summer fun, waiting for that
Big hand to reach the 12.

LIBERATING BELL

(CONT'D)

Three minutes is an eternity.
 "Have a safe summer and ..."
 Her words sound like gibberish
 And I disregard her goodbyes.
 The clock's my sole opponent
 I could detonate at any moment.

Two more. 120 seconds.
 Just the two of us – me and the clock.
 My stare forces that second hand around
 It can't break me, I won't explode, I'm a rock
 Or maybe I'm hypnotized, like a cobra
 Overpowered by a snake charmer.

One minute. I'll be playing in no time:
 Baseball drills in the park and
 Vacations where I'll storm the beach.
 Bivouacs in my tree house.
 My bike will ship me all around town.
 Who knows what adventures I'll get into?

It rings. Music to my ears.
 It's over! Time bomb defused.
 Get up. Run.
 It's summer, this time will fly by.
 Make it count before it's done.
 This won't last forever.

Luke Dimick

SELECTION OF MERIT POETRY

COLLEGIATE BIRDS

Collegiate birds Reign In poetic Blood into my brain,
rushing in lightning war on a daily 8:15,
releasing high gloss pink talons against burnished plate metal.

I throw an apple, skinned alive, to sate their appetites.
It arrives on a boat of manicured stale "stay off" grass
and the birds feast.

I look at them, and they look at me:
a flight and away.

Theodore Parkhurst

SELECTION OF MERIT POETRY

POCKETS

Grandpa's flannel pocket
Hardened honeycomb minus bees
I'll sample swirly minty coins
Or stick with disks of buttery sun

Overall's denim pocket
Birthday Jackson mailed with hugs
Buys cotton candy colored ponies
Or gold-bound pages hiding clues

Trapper Keeper pocket
Answers to wide-ruled questionnaire
Magic 8 Ball says he loves me
Falling petal says loves me not

Boyfriend's rawhide pocket
Safe satisfaction wrapped in foil
Will I make my bed with freedom
Or remain like Mary until I wed

POCKETS

(CONT'D)

Lover's pin-striped pocket

Jack-in-the-box has sprung

Should we tumble like Jack and Jill

Or vow to plant Jack's magic bean

Apron's cotton pocket

Honey added to shopping list

Need minted coins for Jack

Plus sunny butter disks for Jill

Violet Gilbert

SELECTION OF MERIT POETRY

BACK INTO THE BLACK

Black bat,
Witches' cat,
The darkest night,
A person's fright.
Lurking, Slinking,
Slowly decending,
One's mind pretending:
That the dark isn't falling, The
Creatures aren't calling, and
Black isn't really black.

Kristie Lynch

SELECTION OF MERIT POETRY

EQUATIONS

Looking out the window it was clear,
Trees having confessing mouths.
They speak of the two-sided society,
The human race has made itself.
Colorless birches, shady elms and shedding oaks,
Occupy the strayed half of the two-part equation.
Each half plays a significant role, but like a lion,
Without its roar, they are lost without the other.
Like a servant to his king they follow the seasons,
Never producing more than their value,
Dependent on the independent half,
Of the equation to lead them.
Although they can stand alone,
And submerge their roots, they are still,
Only one half of the two-part equation.
The productive apple, seductive pair and arrogant,
Orange trees line the path to an abundant future.
Reproduction, brains and beauty take the hand,
Of the colorless, shady and shedding.
Each has their separate place,
But together they form the whole picture,
Of what makes our world the way it is.
Roots indulge and the equation is complete.

Corey Reid

SELECTION OF MERIT POETRY

EVOLUTION AT ITS BEST

The skeleton door to my heart collapsed,

Most would consider this their mind.

A subtle dusty feeling approached,

Accompanied by a voice I hadn't heard,

Before. I was given two options.

Peacefully, I could either fear, comply,

Listen to this voice and live forever,

Or in most opinions, deny this voice,

Live my earthly life, and like an old dog,

Be put to death.

I knew the tests would come,

I knew the convicting north winds would blow.

EVOLUTION AT ITS BEST

(CONT'D)

Most would stop with no visible rewards,

One could compare this to a dark starry sky,

Just stars to the carnal, it means nothing to them,

But to us, the sons, the stars are more than that.

The way, the love, and the truth with no end.

After my journey and the voice from within

This is something bled,

From the womb, I can concur.

But, when our earthly lives end and we say,

Goodbye. A casket to some, a sign of death,

With an end, but reinforcement to the rest,

A father, a god, an eternal life with no end.

Corey Reid

SELECTION OF MERIT POETRY

THE HUNT

A burning orange and yellow sphere crests the earth's edge,
 The massive plain is struck with molten tones, heat and stretching shadow.
 The tall grass of the Serengeti whips and pulls at her hair,
 The mauled sound of wind flourishing through the burnt grass sounds of rain in the dry air,
 The blurred vision of heat gasses dance in front of her target.
 Crouched and lost to the eye, she approaches her prey slowly
 Tediously.
 The blades of her shoulders peak from left to right
 She distributes 400 pounds on each of her massive appendages while they lightly skim the thirsty earth.
 For over 3 million years she has been a deity, a warrior, the Monarch.

A provider.

Stalking the young and prime Impala,
 She waits and watches as the animal feeds.
 His striped and twisted horns bob up and down from his nourishment,
 His abdomen rising and falling calm and sure.

He lifts his head and his eyes spread, peeling the horizon,
 His breath shortens, quick and heavy.

She can smell his anguish and panic.

This was fast.
 A rush. A burst. Forty mph.
 Her claws gouge, breaking the surface of the ground,
 Swift and agile, she leaps to receive.

He is strangled.

Her mandible shovels him.
 His fluid runs a path down her neck.
 Her kill.

Home to the pride.

Stacy Schlandraff

SELECTION OF MERIT POETRY

THE BEACH

the beAch-

it's summer
the days are l o n g

h
g
i

the sun is h
children playing laughing
joy is in the air

it's summer
adayat thebeach
bucketsofsand
wavesofwater
picnic baskets

a day at the beach because it's summer
the days are l o n g

h
g
i

the sun is h
children playing laughing
joy is in the air

i remember as a child playing laughing
i remember the bucketsofsand
i remember the wavesofwater
i remember the picnic baskets
it's summer – a day at the beAch

Andrea D. Mills

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